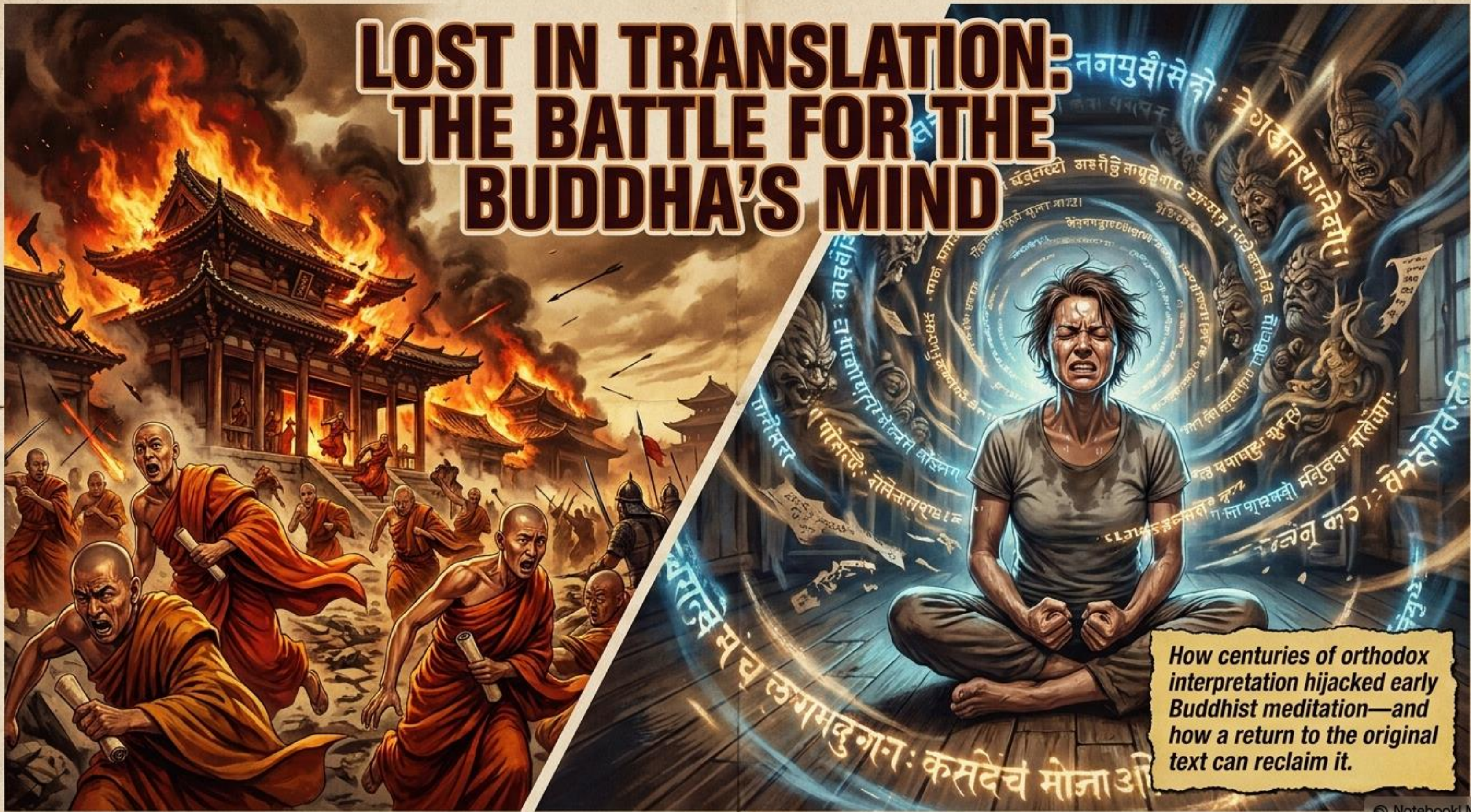


LOST IN TRANSLATION: THE BATTLE FOR THE BUDDHA'S MIND



How centuries of orthodox interpretation hijacked early Buddhist meditation—and how a return to the original text can reclaim it.



THE TEXTS WE RELY ON WERE FILTERED THROUGH A SINGLE SURVIVING SECT.

The Mahāvihāra Monopoly

Early English pioneers relied entirely on orthodox Theravāda commentaries sanctioned by the Mahāvihāra sect in 5th-century Ceylon.

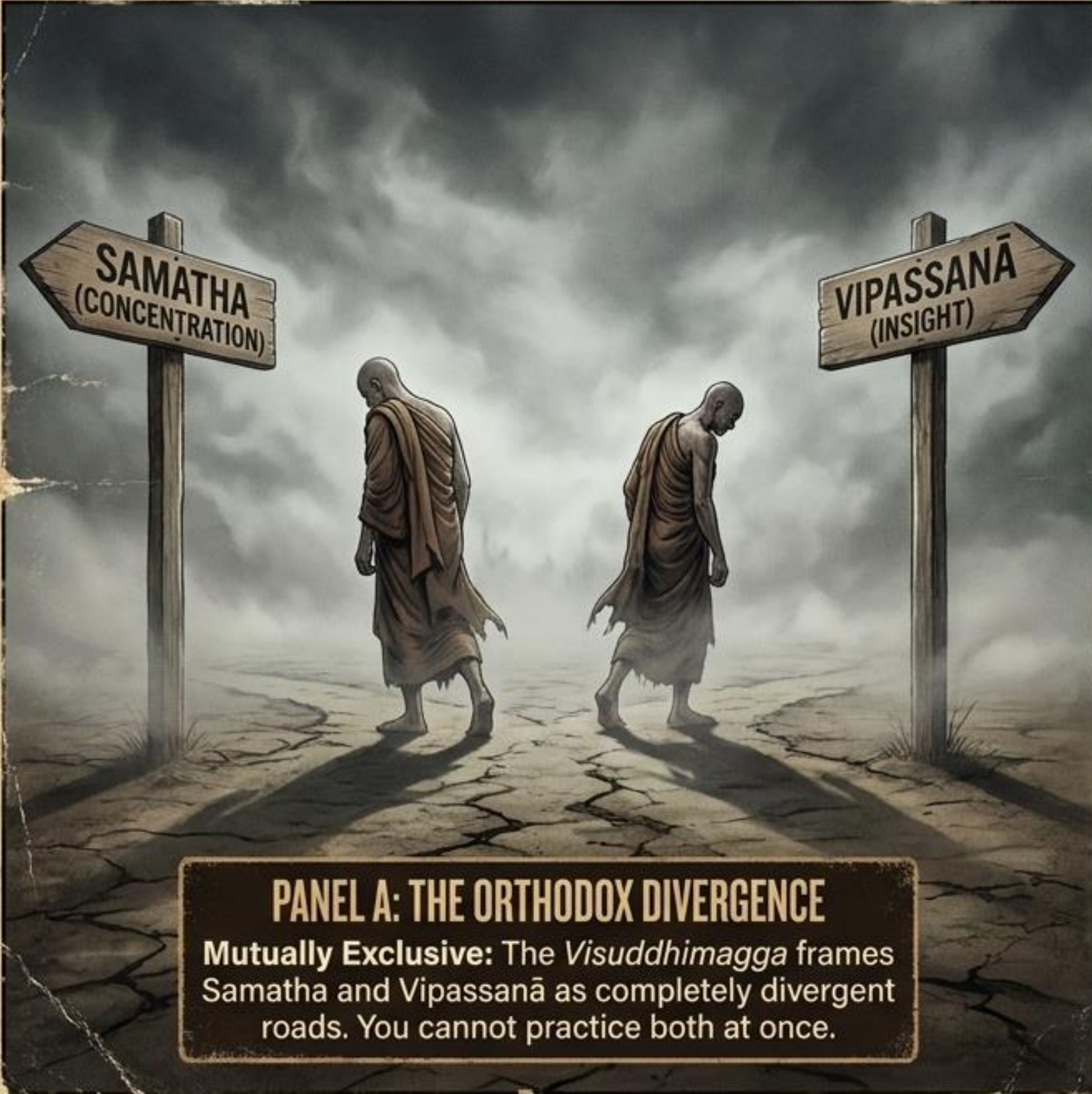
The Price of Orthodoxy

Rival sects were annihilated in the 12th century; their scriptures were burned and lost to history.

The Scholarly Shift

The commentaries view the suttas through the lens of a complex exegetical method...
... [which] does not necessarily correspond to the way the teachings were understood in the earliest period. — Bhikkhu Bodhi

ORTHODOX TRADITION SEPARATED SAMATHA AND VIPASSANĀ; THE EARLY TEXTS UNITED THEM.



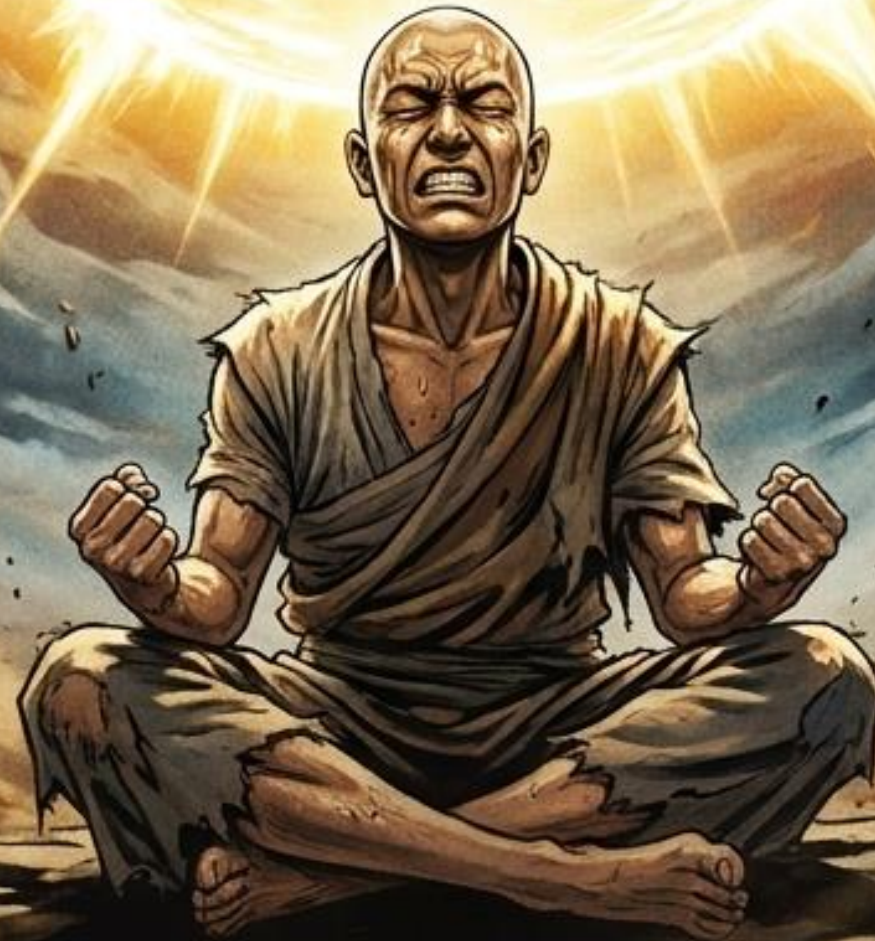
THE POPULAR METHOD OF CONCENTRATION MEDITATION IS FOREIGN TO THE EARLY TEXTS

1. IGNORE ALL SENSES.

2. FOCUS ON ONE
SINGLE POINT.

3. WAIT FOR THE COGNITIVE MIND
TO FABRICATE A GLOWING
MENTAL OBJECT (NIMITTA).

4. MERGE INTO COMPLETE,
BLIND ABSORPTION.



THE SUTTA WARNING

When one lives with restraint over the faculty of the mind, the mind is not soaked in things cognizable by the mind.

(PamādaVihāri Sutta, SN 35.97)

You cannot practice the Noble Eightfold Path while utterly absorbed and disconnected.

ACROSS BUDDHIST TRADITIONS, SAMATHA ORIGINALLY MEANT SETTLING THE MIND, NOT FORCING IT.

EARLY PĀLI SUTTAS

Ceto-samatha: Mental settling / bringing the mind to a halt.

TIBETAN BUDDHISM

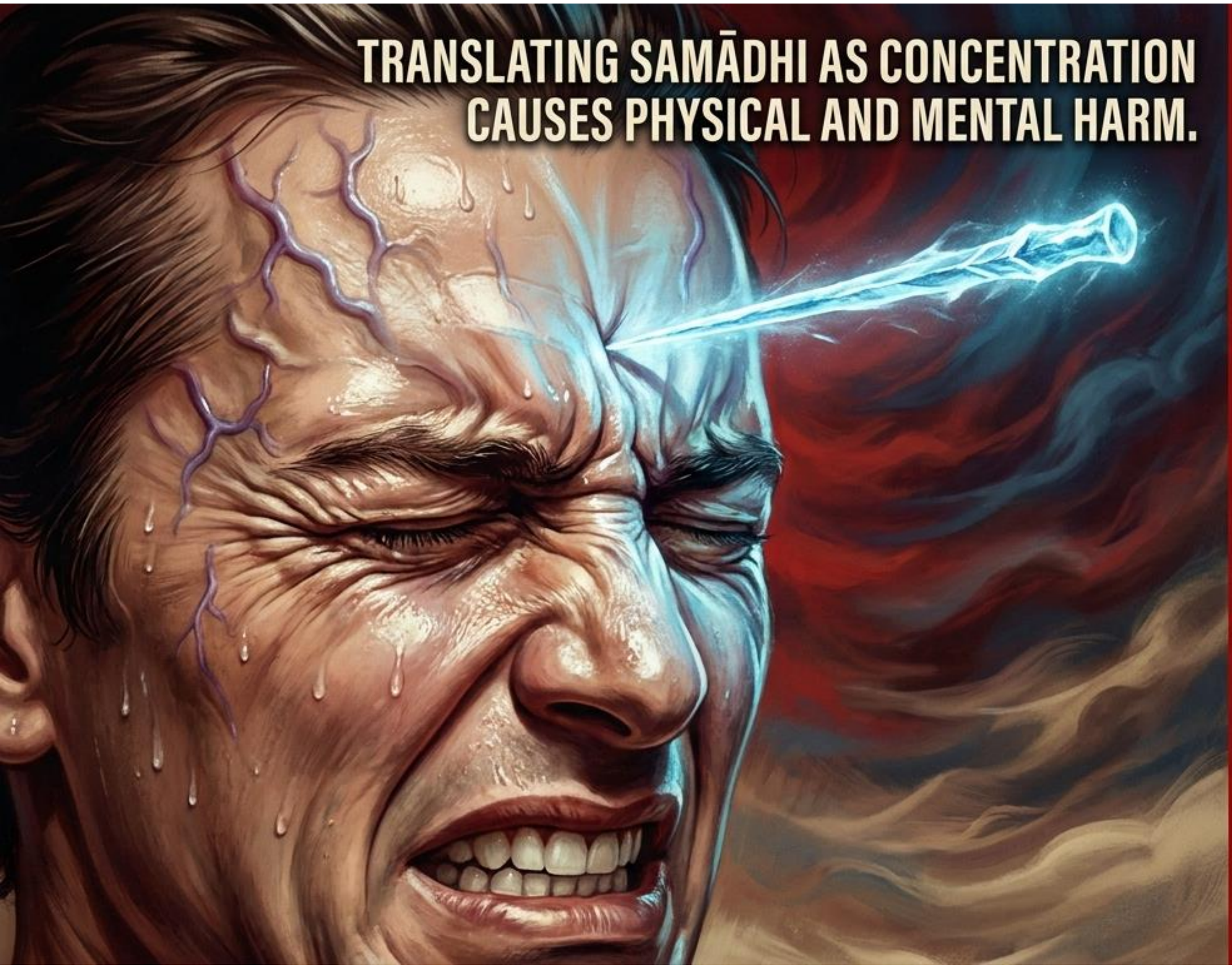
Shinay: Calm abiding.

CHINESE BUDDHISM

止 (zhǐ): Cease, stop, halt.
止息 (zhǐ xī): Rest.



SUMMARY: ANY PRACTICE THAT SUCCESSFULLY SETTLES THE MIND—EVEN SCRUTINIZING THE DRAWBACKS OF UNSKILLFUL THOUGHTS—IS SAMATHA



TRANSLATING SAMĀDHI AS CONCENTRATION CAUSES PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HARM.

THE STONE-IN-THE-HEAD SYNDROME

Meditators attempting to maintain undivided attention on a single point routinely report severe tension, fatigue, and sleeping disorders.

THE NEEDLE FALLACY

Burmese traditions translate samādhi as su-saik-khyin (needle-affixed-ness), encouraging forceful piercing of the object.

THE CONTRADICTION

Trying to penetrate truth with effortful concentration is like trying to understand air by spearing it. The early texts require a mind that is pliant, flexible, and malleable—impossible under intense force.

[**Sam**
(Together) + **Ādahati**
(Put, place) = Put together
/ Compose /
Collect] } [**Samāhita**
(Participle form) = A mind that
is gathered,
not scattered.]

THE ROOT

THE RESULT

SAMĀDHI IS THE ACT OF GATHERING
AND COMPOSING, NOT POINTING AND PIERCING.

Global Parallels:
The German translation
Sammlung translates
perfectly to Collectedness.

The Chinese dìng (定)
means calm/stable, not
concentrated.

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

RT/NO: [REDACTED]

THE SAMĀDHI SPECTRUM: HOW TRANSLATION DICTATES THE REALITY OF YOUR PRACTICE

CONCENTRATION

THE ACTION:

Forceful, continuous focusing of attention on an object.



SENSORY STATE:

Requires a silent environment; intolerant of noise, cutting off the 5 senses.



THE GOAL:

Sinking into an object to achieve complete dissociation and absorption.



COMPOSURE

THE ACTION:

Stabilizing, settling, and gathering the mind itself.



SENSORY STATE:

Tolerant of sensory impingement. Proper composure requires tolerance of forms, sounds, odors, etc.



THE GOAL:

Achieving clarity, flexibility, and distinct vision according to reality.



THE LINGUISTIC ABSURDITY OF THE ONE-POINTED MIND.



THE LINGUISTIC FORMULA

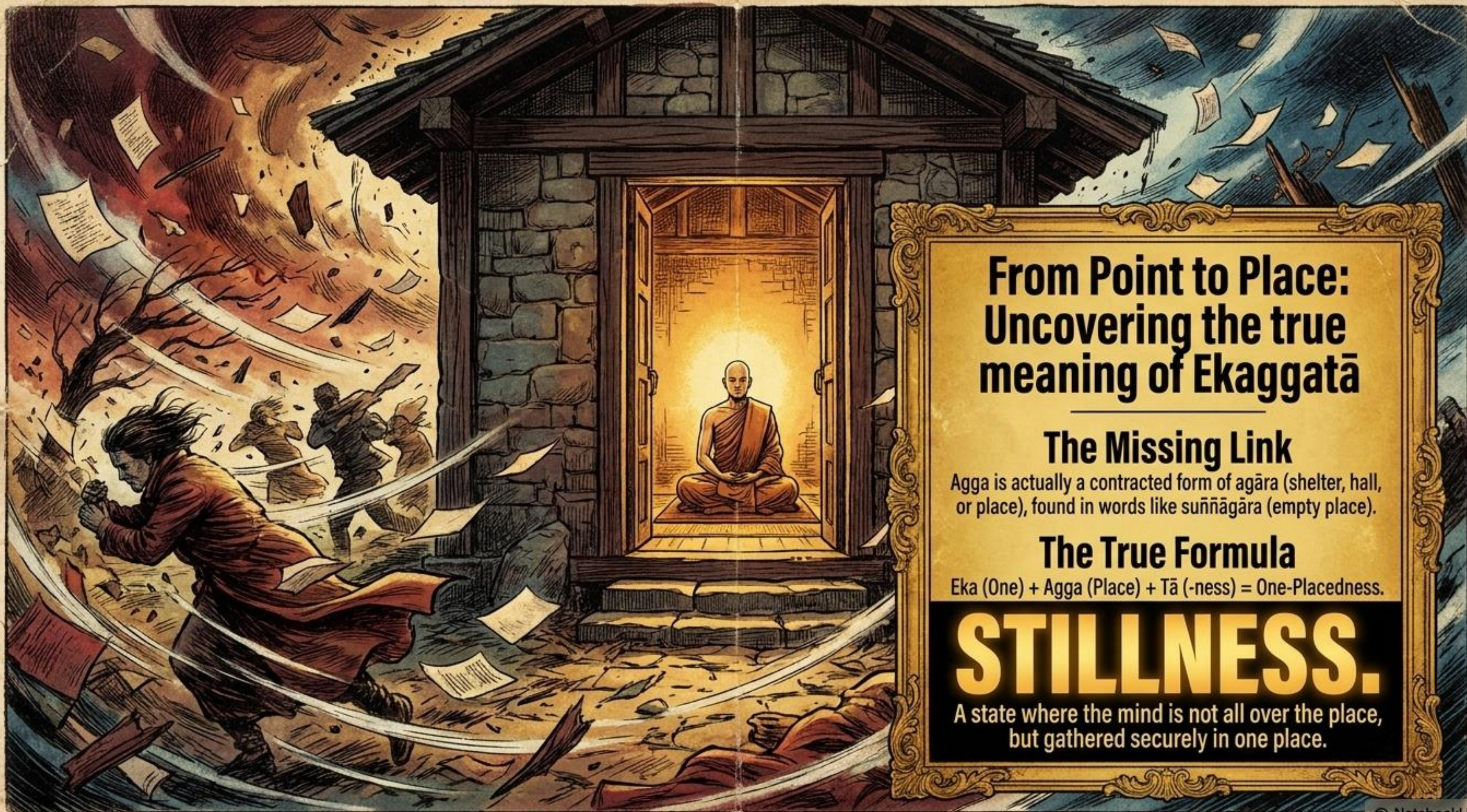
Eka (One) + Agga (Point/Top) + Citta (Mind) = Ekaggacitta.

THE PROBLEM WITH “AGGA”

In Pāli, *agga* means a literal top or tip (e.g., *pabtagga* = mountain top, *āragga* = sharp point of an awl).

THE VERDICT

Translating *ekaggacitta* as one-pointed mind forces us to accept nonsensical spatial metaphors like One-Mountain-Top Mind or One-Sharp-End Mind.



From Point to Place: Uncovering the true meaning of Ekaggatā

The Missing Link

Agga is actually a contracted form of agāra (shelter, hall, or place), found in words like suññāgāra (empty place).

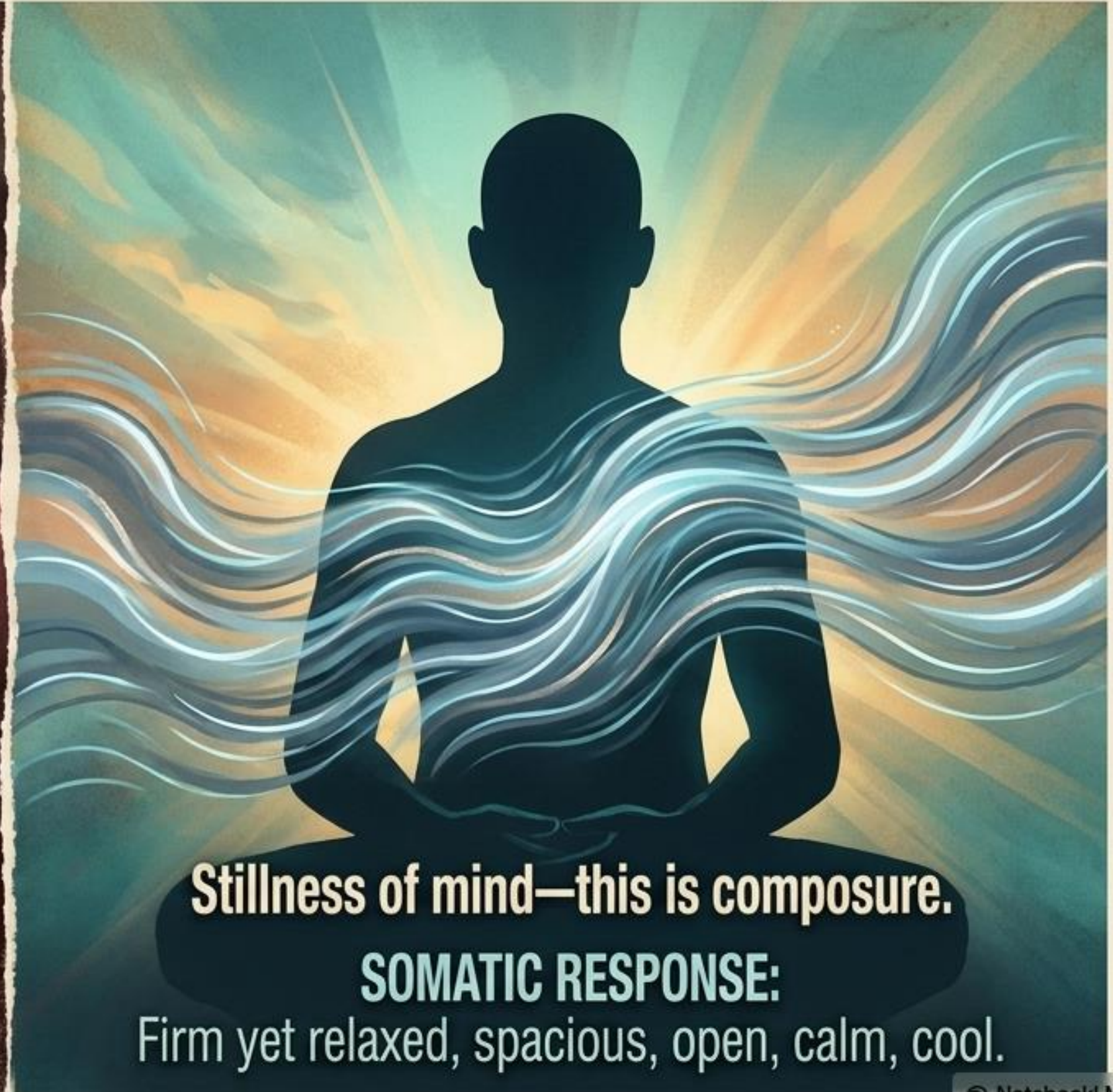
The True Formula

Eka (One) + Agga (Place) + Tā (-ness) = One-Placedness.

STILLNESS.

A state where the mind is not all over the place,
but gathered securely in one place.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WEIGHT OF WORDS: A somatic experiment.



Re-yoking the Path: A natural progression to Awakening.

THE RESTORED FRAMEWORK



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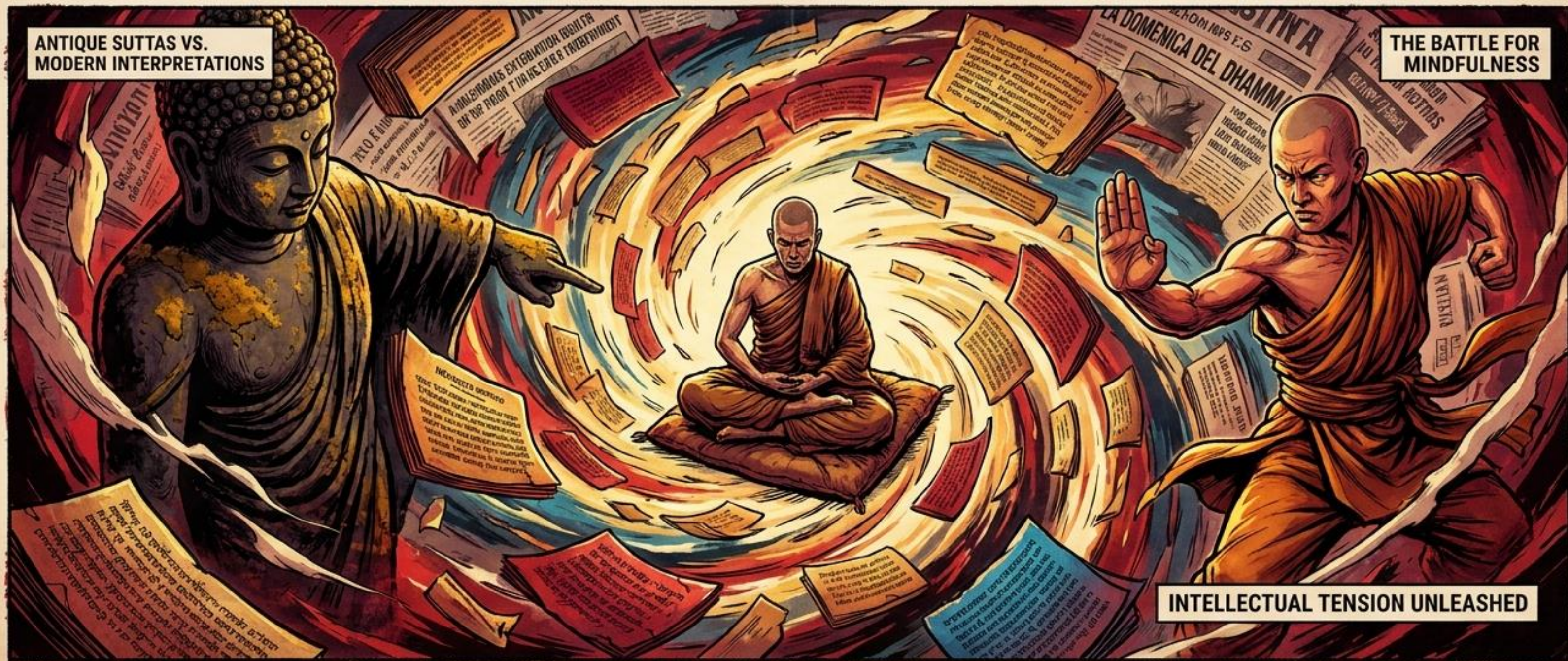
THE JHĀNA CRISIS

PREZZO
L. 100

Navigating the Epic Clash Between the Suttas and Modern Orthodoxy

ANTIQUE SUTTAS VS.
MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

THE BATTLE FOR
MINDFULNESS



INTELLECTUAL TENSION UNLEASHED

The Thesis



Sammā·samādhi is repeatedly defined in the *Suttas* as the four *jhānas*. Going by the *Suttas*, *jhāna* is necessary for the cessation of *dukkha*.

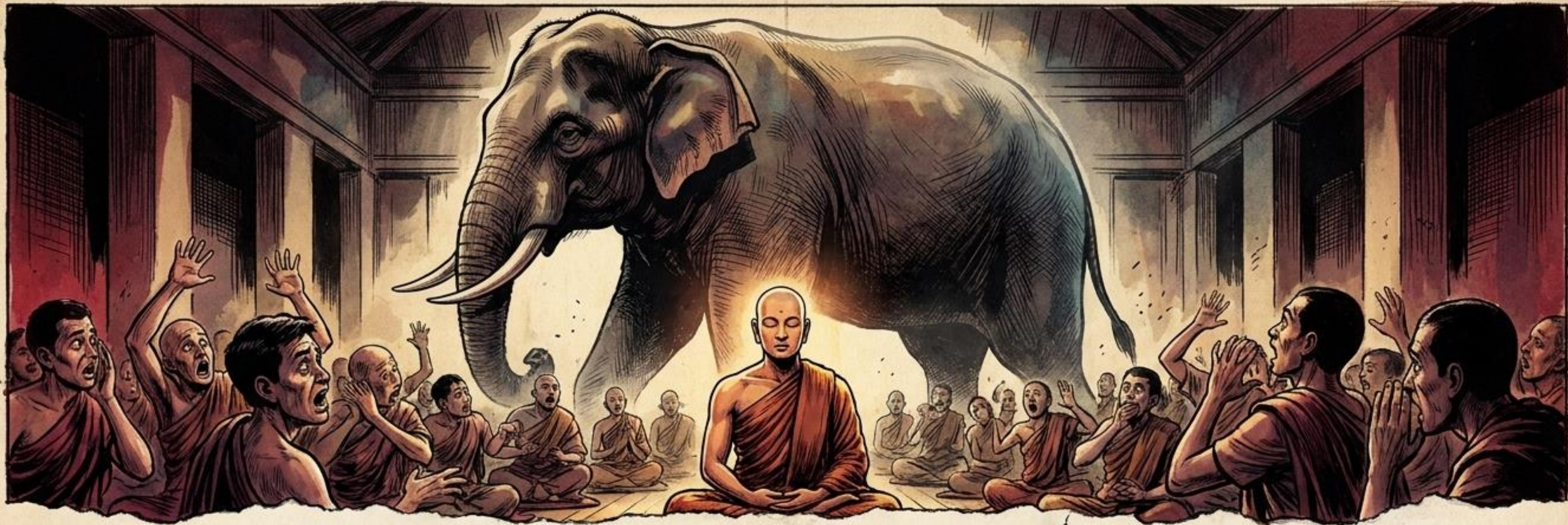
The Antithesis



Ajahn Chah: "That which can be most harmful to the meditator is absorption *samādhi* (*jhāna*)... This is a danger."

Sayadaw U Tejaniya: "We don't need *jhānic samādhi*; you cannot use absorption concentration for *vipassanā*."

The Meditator's Paradox: How can the Buddha's explicitly required path be 'most harmful'?



The Frustrated Quitter



Struggling to achieve absorption and quitting due to tension.

The Stagnant Attainer



Achieving absorption, but old patterns of suffering return.

The Taboo



Treating *jhāna* as a taboo subject to avoid the contradiction.

Conclusion?

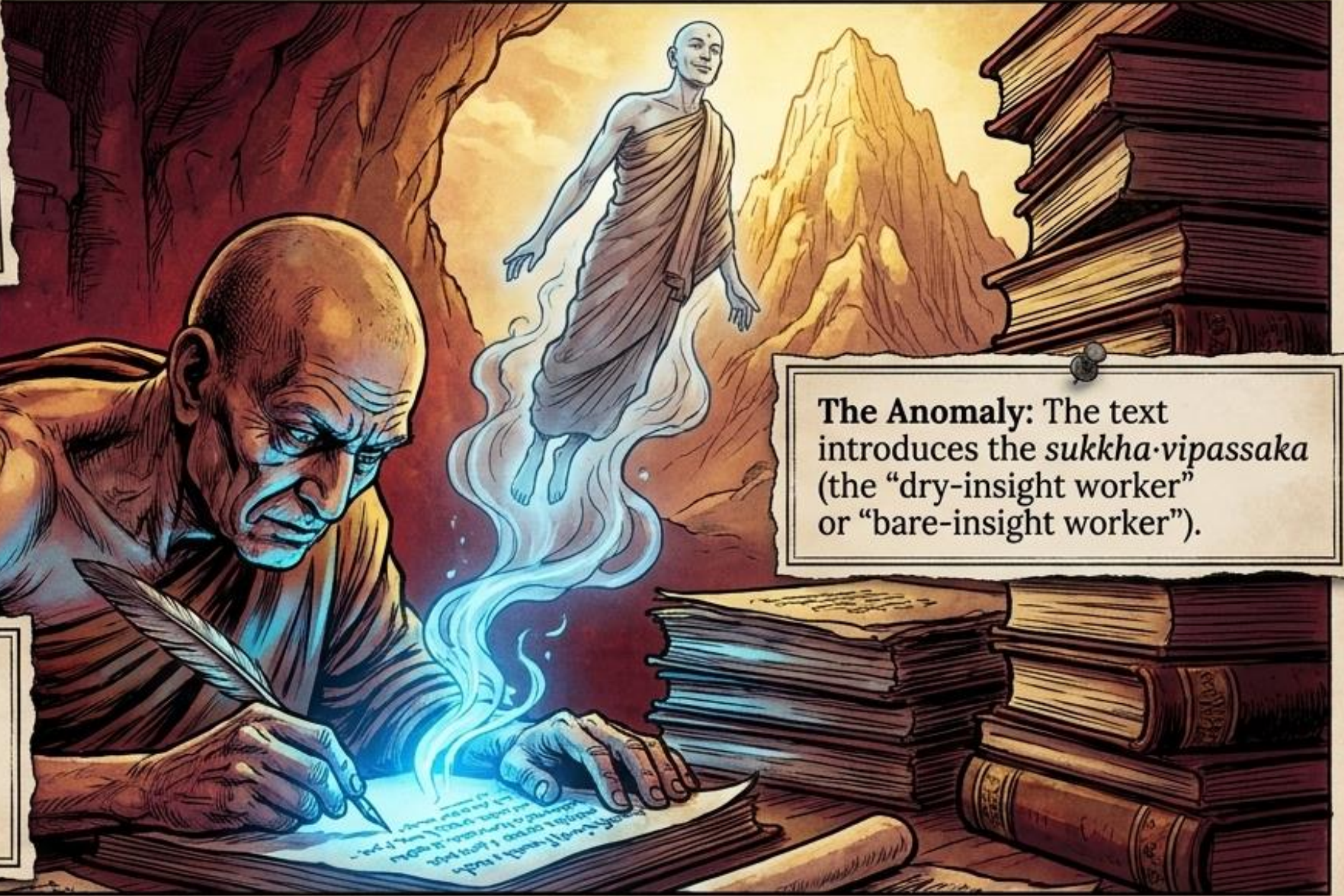
The result? An erosion of faith in the Dhamma and a rise in sectarian clinging. We must confront the elephant.

The 5th Century Shift: The Visuddhimagga

The Origin of the Conflict: The idea that jhāna is unnecessary does not come from the Suttas. It stems from the Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification), a 5th-century post-canonical text.

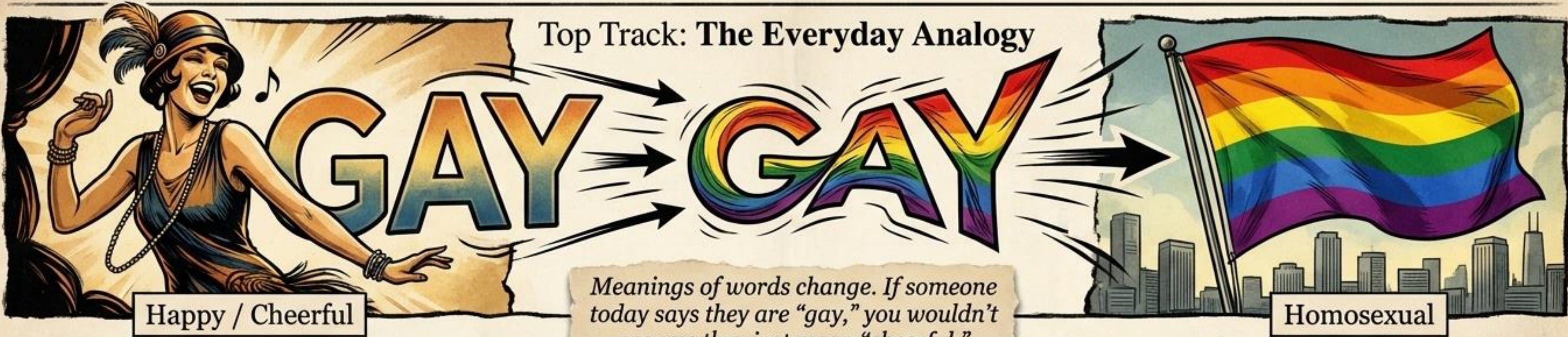
The Implication: This asserts that an arahant can attain Awakening without any previous experience of jhāna—a direct contradiction to the Noble Eight-factored Path of the Suttas.

The Anomaly: The text introduces the *sukkha-vipassaka* (the “dry-insight worker” or “bare-insight worker”).

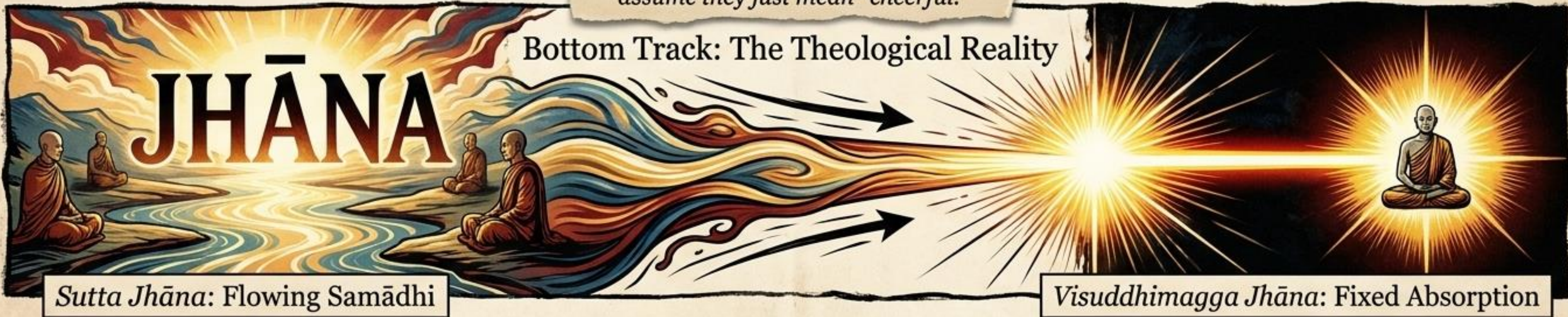


Semantic Drift: The Illusion Unveiled

Top Track: The Everyday Analogy

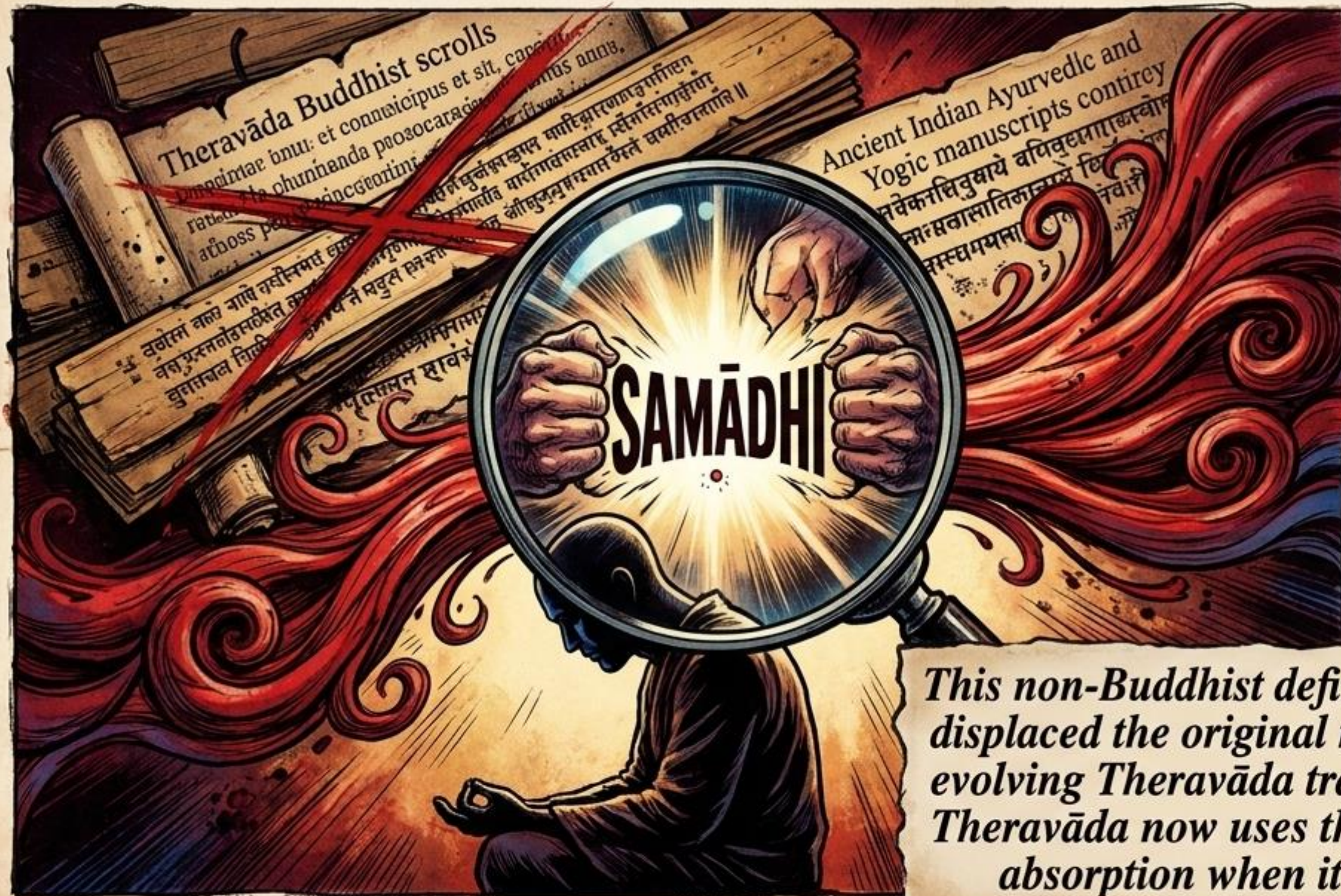


Bottom Track: The Theological Reality



The texts are separated by centuries. They use the exact same word to describe two completely different states.

The External Infiltration of 'Absorption'



Ayurveda and the Mind (Dr. David Frawley):
“Samādhi is a state of absorption in which our consciousness becomes entirely concentrated in a single object... we forget all other things.”

The Yoga Sutras:
The Eighth Limb of Yoga defines Samādhi as absorption.

This non-Buddhist definition of absorption gradually displaced the original meaning of jhāna in the evolving Theravāda tradition. Modern orthodox Theravāda now uses the Yogic definition of absorption when it warns against “jhāna.”

The Diagnostic Matrix: Mechanics of the Mind



THE ORIGINAL: Sutta Jhāna



THE REVISION: Visuddhimagga Jhāna

Relation to
Path

Absolutely Necessary
(Part of the Eightfold Path).

Strictly Optional
(*Sukkha-vipassaka* bypasses it).

Attainability

Attainable if the first 7
path-factors are met.

Requires persistent, exclusive focus
on a single conceptual object.

Nature of
the State

A Mental Action.

A Mental State.

Role of the
Object

Object is secondary; changing
objects is necessary for refinement.

Object is paramount; builds
concentration for total absorption.

The Diagnostic Matrix: The Sensory Experience

THE ORIGINAL: Sutta Jhāna

Body Awareness

Heightened experience of the physical body.

Hearing

Sound is NOT suspended.

Hindrances

Abandoned (pahīna).

Spiritual Bypass Risk

Impossible. Defilements are easily seen due to heightened awareness.



THE REVISION: Visuddhimagga Jhāna

Body Awareness

Total loss of physical body awareness.

Hearing

Sound is completely suspended.

Hindrances

Temporarily Suppressed (vikkhambhita).

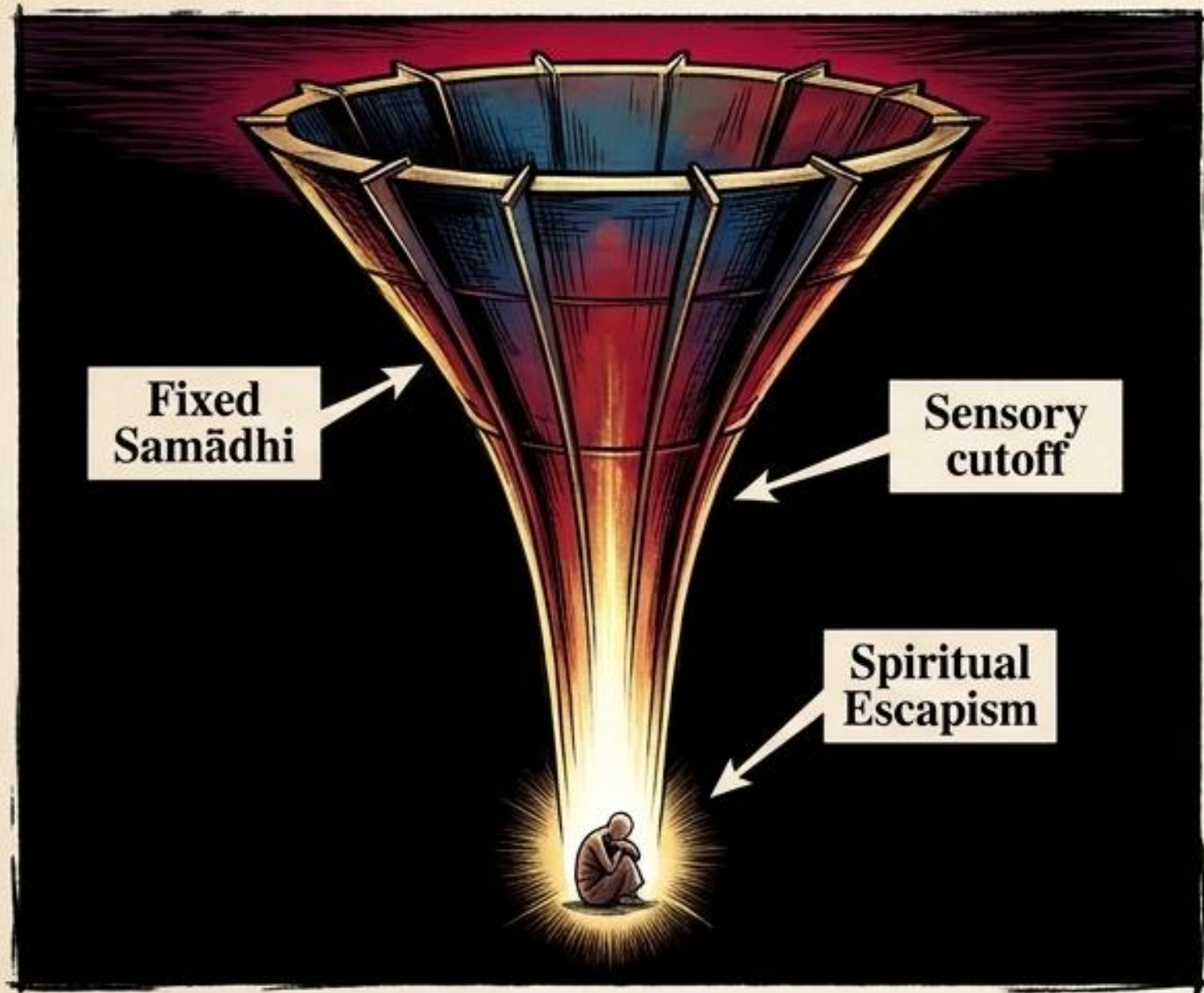
Spiritual Bypass Risk

High Risk. Exclusive concentration creates an escape from unhappiness.



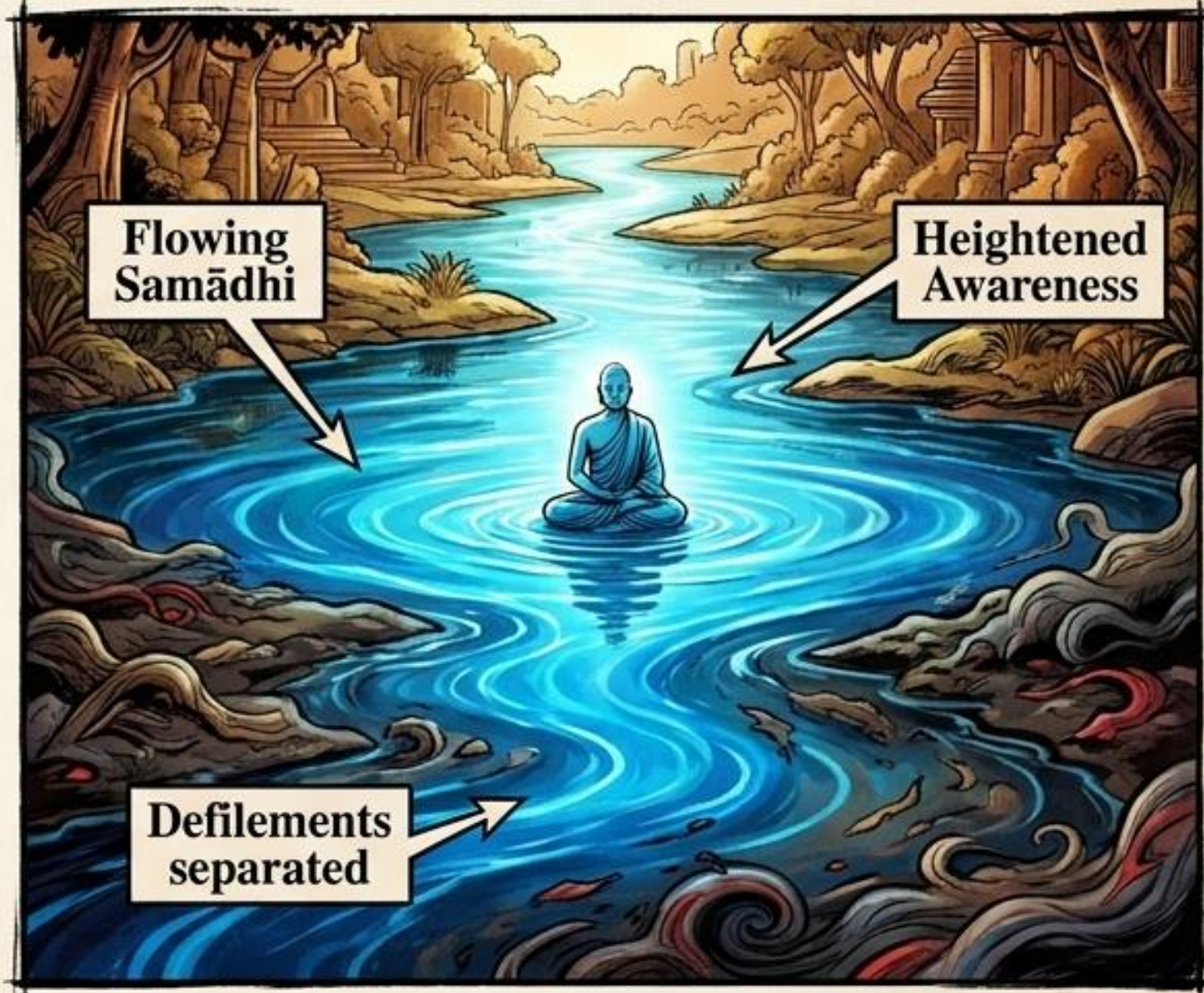
Visualizing the Mental Geometries

The Absorption Funnel (*Visuddhimagga*)



Concentration totally divorced from any awareness of the body. Delight in the desired object.

The Flowing Stream (*Suttas*)



Peaceful, easeful, light; born of separation from sensuality. Discernment can arise.

Two Maps, One Landscape



THE CONFLICT:

If you read the Original Map using the Revised Map's definitions, you will mistakenly believe the treacherous cliff is mandatory.

The One-In-A-Million Climb

The Samatha Route

Ah, the bliss!

A temporary sensory experience, not true liberation.

The Visuddhimagga's Own Admission

The revised map explicitly states that this steep route of absorption is exceptionally rare.

The Mathematics of Absorption

According to Visuddhimagga (XII.8), 'jhāna' is attainable by only 1 in $100 \times 100 \times 100$.

The Metric

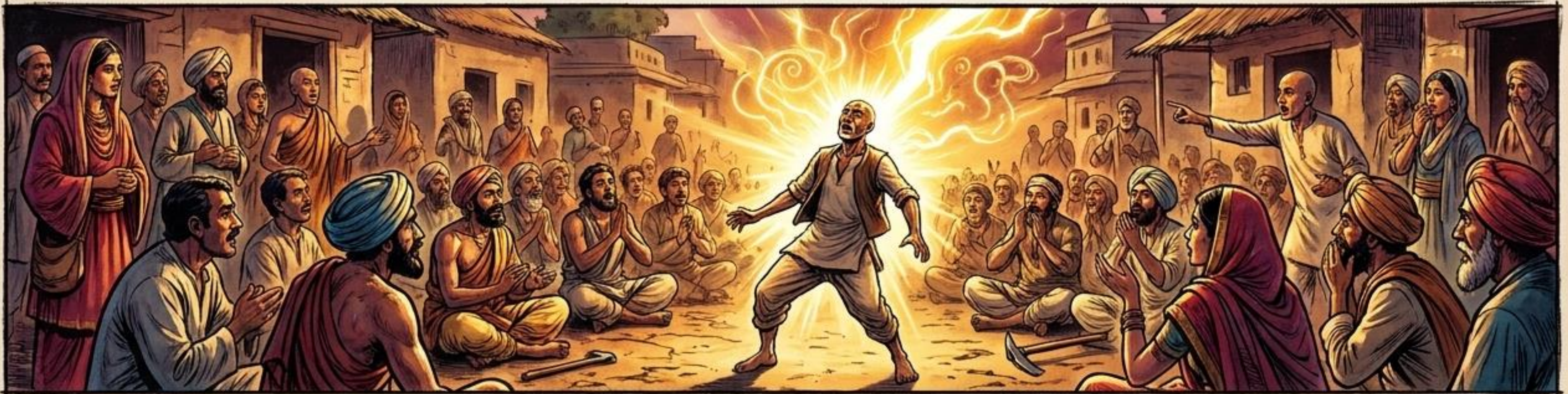
1 in 1,000,000 practitioners.
(Optimistic ratio).

The pessimistic ratio is 1 in 1,000,000,000.

The 'Listening' Paradox Solved

The Mystery: How did laypeople awaken just by listening to the Buddha, having never meditated, if *jhāna* is absolutely required? (e.g., Kuṭṭhi Sutta Ud5.3).

The Strained Excuse: Orthodoxy claims they must have practiced *jhāna* in a previous life.



The Crystal Clear Solution:

- They did not achieve *Visuddhimagga*-style 'absorption' while **listening** (which cuts off hearing).
- They did achieve Sutta-style *jhāna* ('flowing *samādhi*').
- By attentively listening and contemplating the Dhamma, their minds **unified**, abandoning hindrances while **retaining full** sensory awareness—the exact definition of the original *jhāna*.

The Illusion Dissolves



Left Dictionary (*Sutta Lexicon*)

Thesis Validated: The Buddha is right. You must attain *Sutta Jhāna* (flowing *samādhi*, heightened awareness, separation from defilements) to Awaken.

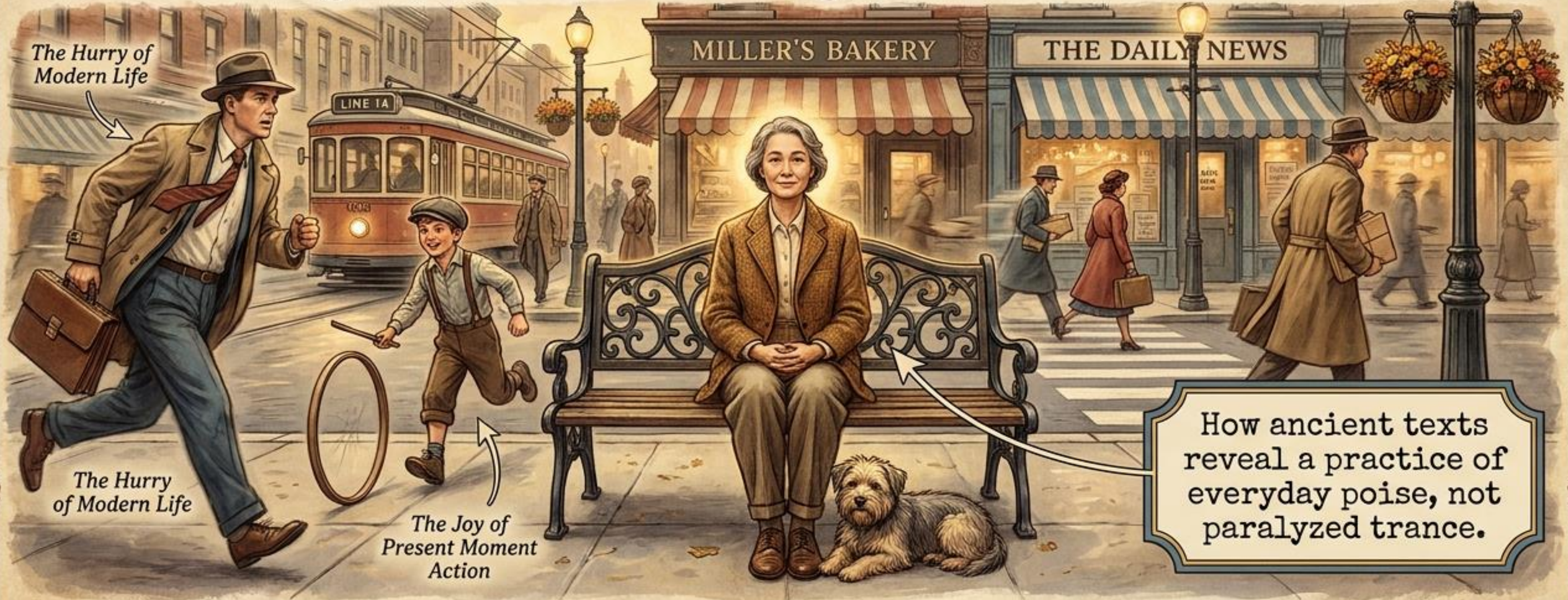
Right Dictionary (*Orthodox Lexicon*)

Antithesis Validated: Modern masters (Ajahn Chah, *Visuddhimagga*) are also right. You do not need *Visuddhimagga Jhāna* (exclusive absorption, sensory cutoff). Seeking it can lead to spiritual escapism.

The debate is based on a misunderstanding of semantic drift. When a modern master warns you away from “Jhāna,” they are warning you away from absorption, not the Noble Eightfold Path. Unlearn the vocabulary to clear the path to liberation.

THE EVERYDAY JHĀNA

Reclaiming the Lost Meanings of Buddhist Meditation



TRANSLATION SHAPES REALITY

The Orthodox Translation:
One-Pointed Concentration
(*samāhitam cittam ekaggam*).



The Result: Assuming meditation requires fixing undivided attention on a spatially limited location, leading to sensory blockage and literal accidents.

The Sutta Translation:
Composed & Still.



The Result: A complex mind-eye-body coordination. The meditator can safely and gracefully move about the world.

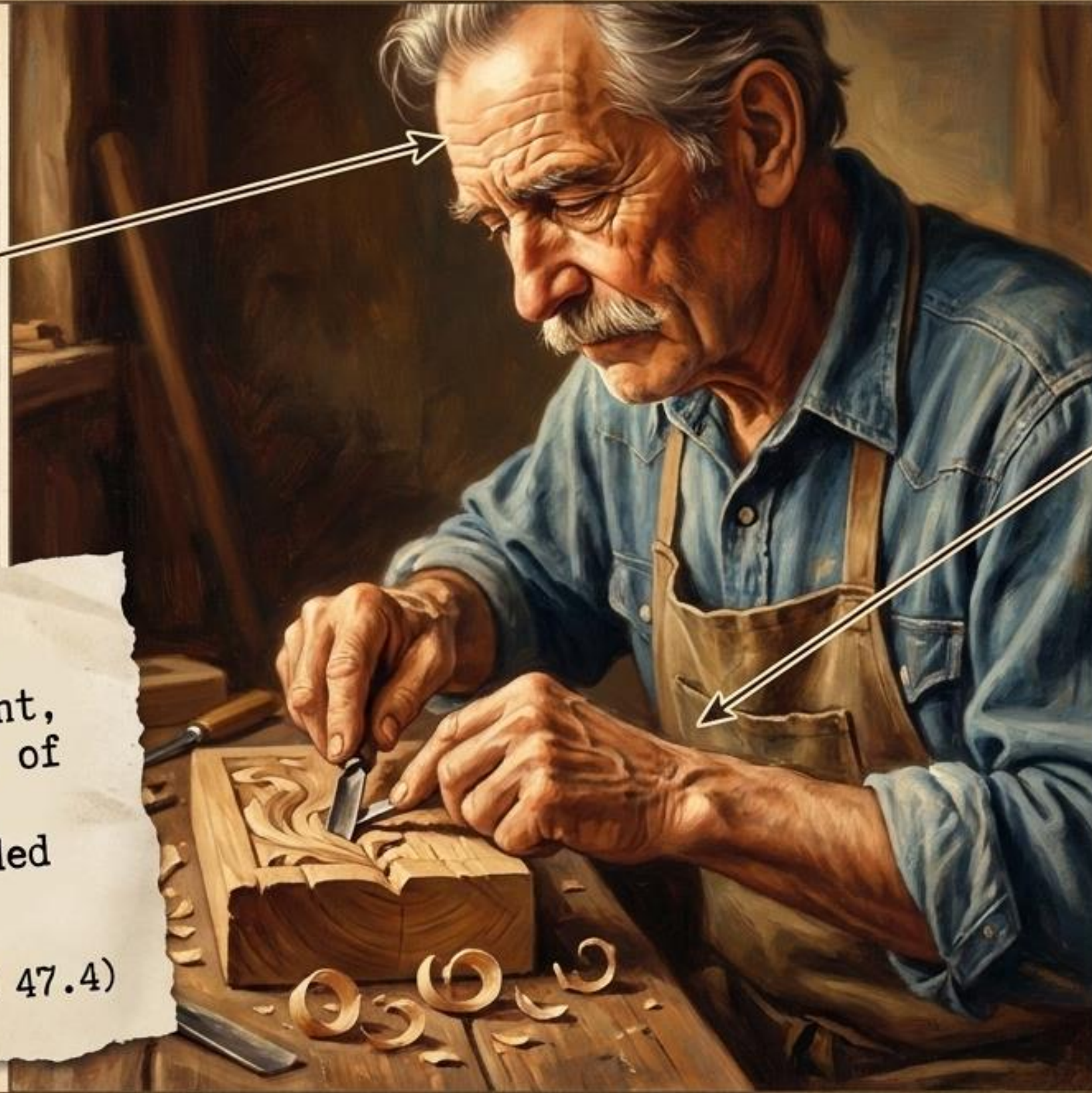
Whatever we think meditation should be, we will try to make it so.

Demystifying Ekagga: Stillness in Motion

The Old View:
A 'One-pointed mind'
forced onto a single
pinpoint.

Abide in the body as
body-observers, ardent,
fully aware, poised, of
radiant mind,
composed, still-minded
(ekaggacittā)...

— Sāla Sutta (SN 47.4)



The New View:
'Still-minded'
(ekaggacittā).
A stillness that
allows for radiant,
full-body awareness.

Takeaway

Ekagga is not about
shrinking attention,
but achieving a
stillness where natural
mindfulness thrives.

The Equation of Mental Poise (Ekodibhāva)

The Problem: We cannot say “unification of mind” (the orthodox translation).
You unify two or more things, not one. So how can a single mind be unified?

→ **EKA** (Equal / Same) ←

+ **O** (Inside) + ←

→ + **DHI** (Holding) = ←

→ = Equal-Inside-Holding ←

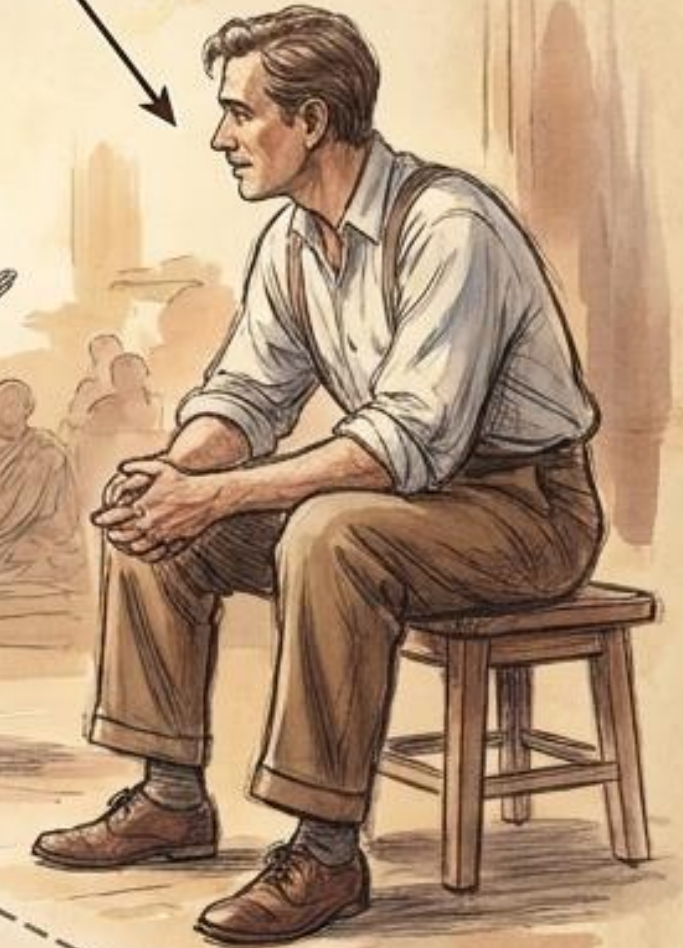
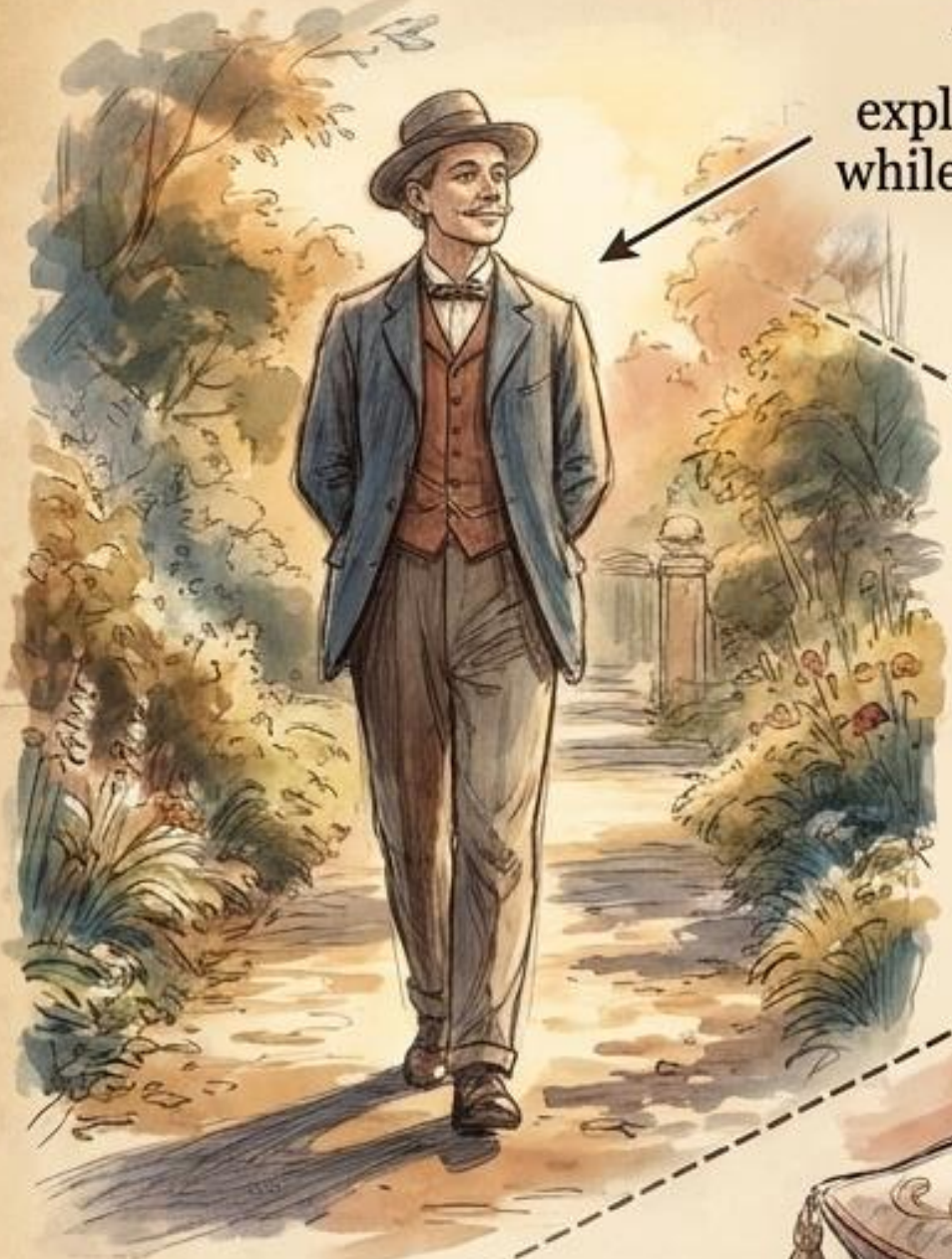
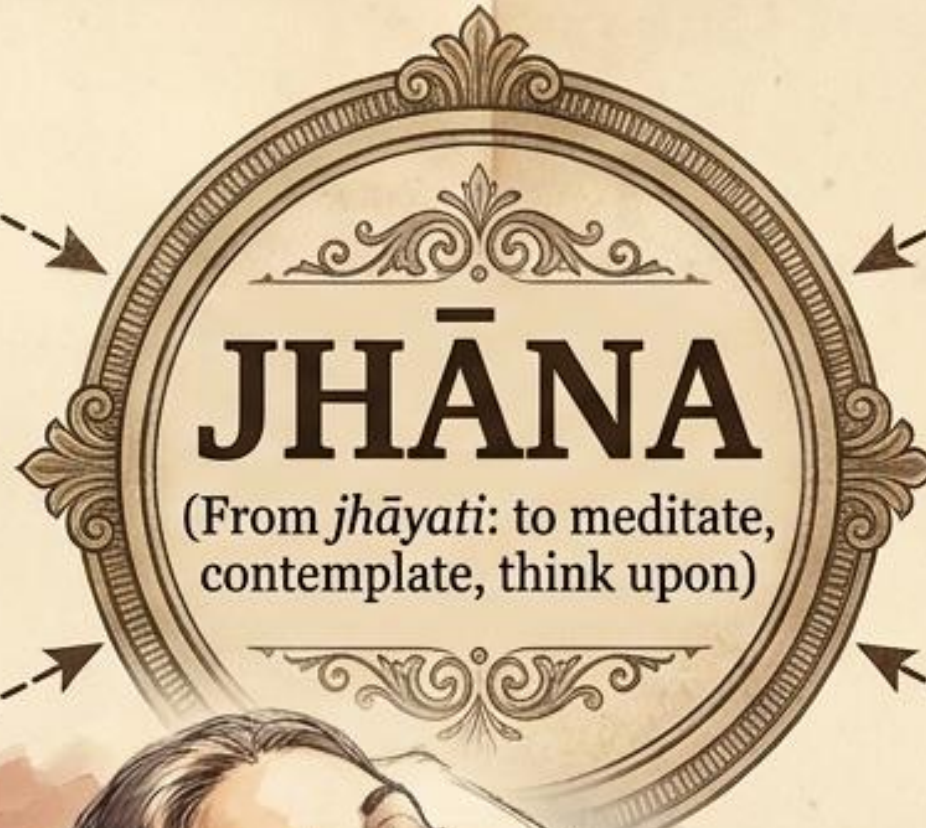
→ **EQUIPOISE** ←

Cetaso ekodibhāva is not a mystical merging of entities. It is simply a state of profound ‘mental poise’—a dignified, balanced, and steady bearing.

Jhāna is an Action, Not an Absorbed Trance

Walking & Standing: The Buddha explicitly stated that walking back and forth while engaging in jhāna is “celestial walking”.

Listening: Suppabuddha the leper attained awakening while listening to a Dhamma talk, requiring active cognitive processing.



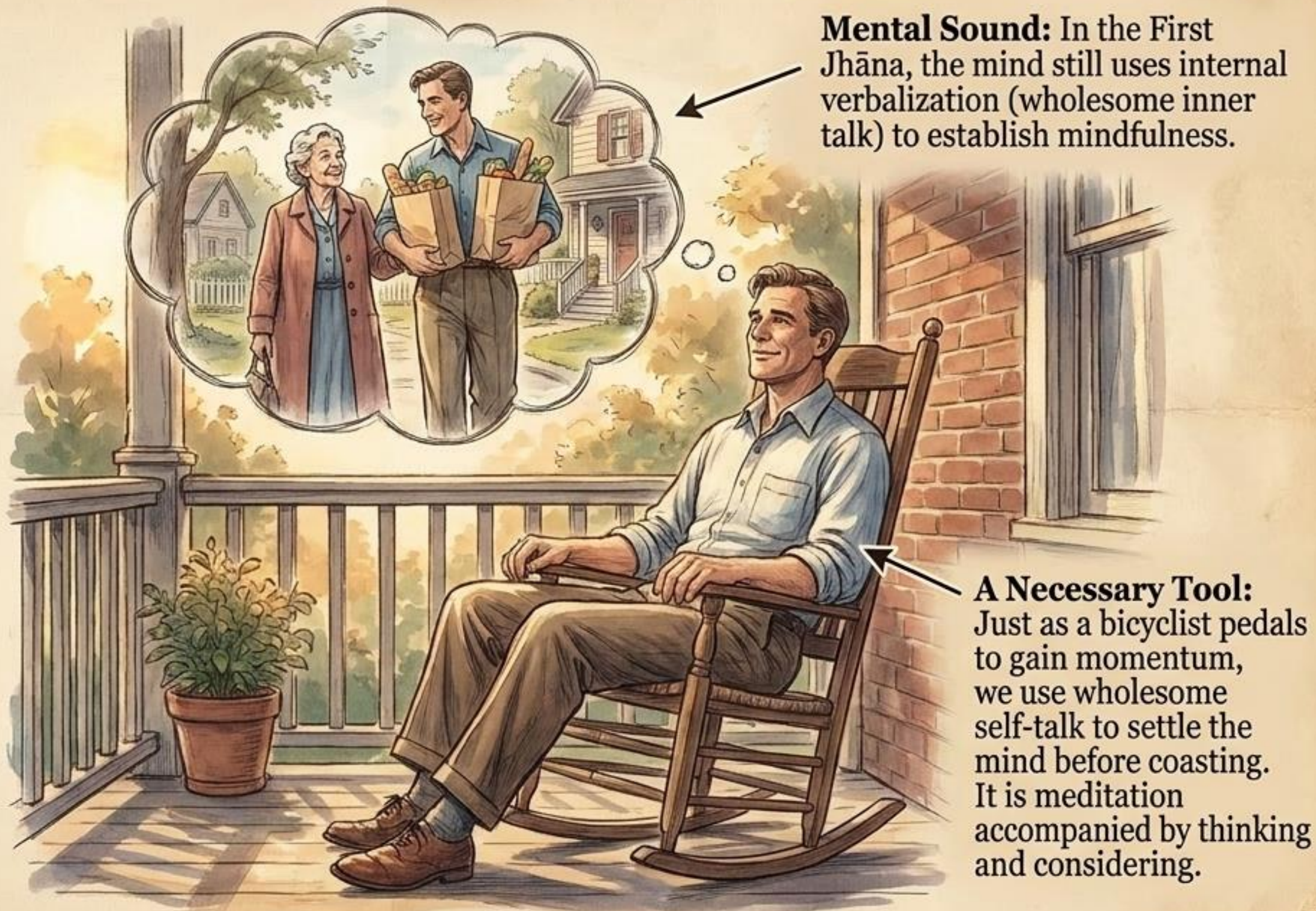
Breathing: The texts describe “non-breathing jhāna”, proving that normal *jhāna* involves natural breathing.

If jhāna were a state of total sensory absorption, one could not walk, stand, or listen to a teaching while doing it. It simply translates to ‘meditation’.

The Sound of Inner Talk (*Vitakka* & *Vicāra*)

Orthodox View:
Initial and sustained
application (forcing
the mind onto an
object).

Sutta View:
Thinking (*vitakka*)
and Considering
(*vicāra*).



Mental Sound: In the First Jhāna, the mind still uses internal verbalization (wholesome inner talk) to establish mindfulness.

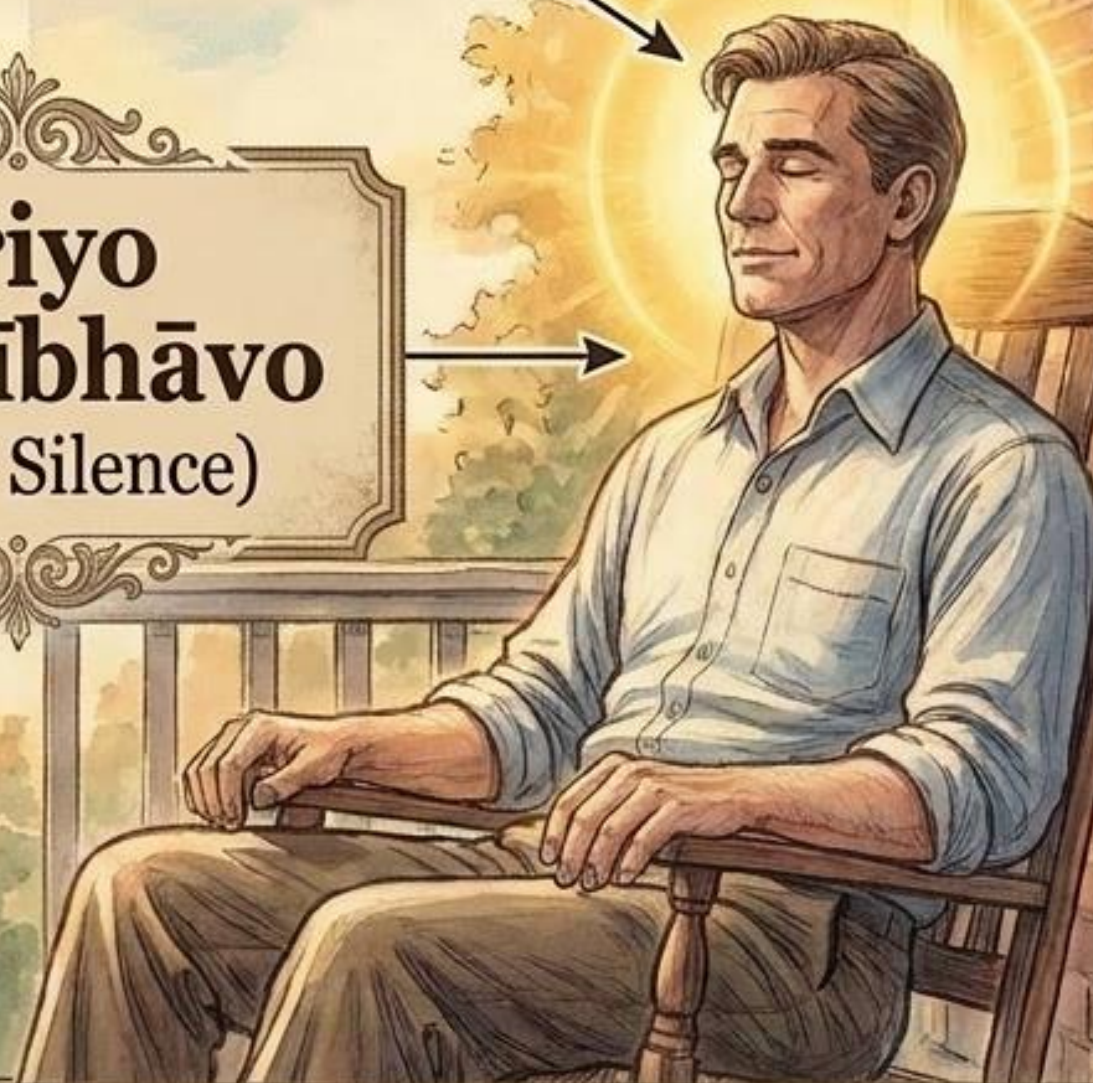
A Necessary Tool:
Just as a bicyclist pedals to gain momentum, we use wholesome self-talk to settle the mind before coasting. It is meditation accompanied by thinking and considering.

The Arrival of Noble Silence

The Quiescence of Inner Talk:
Vitakka (thinking) and *vicāra*
(considering) naturally settle
as the mind's momentum
takes over.

Transitioning to
the Second Jhāna

**Ariyo
Tuṇhībhāvo**
(Noble Silence)



Many meditation centers use 'Noble Silence' to mean 'don't speak aloud.' But in the Suttas, it means the cessation of internal verbal fabrication. The mind stops producing mental sound and rests in internal illumination and poise.

The Umbrella Metaphor (*Vivicca* & *Viveka*)

The Environment:
Sensuality and subtler
unskillful qualities.

The First Jhāna:
Joy and happiness born
of separation
(*Vivekajam pītisukham*).

The Meditator:
Safe, joyful,
and observing.



Orthodox Error:
Translating *vivicca* as
“secluded from” implies
the rain completely
ceases to exist.

Sutta Reality:
Translating it as
“separated from”
acknowledges reality.
Unskillful qualities may
still arise in the mind’s
periphery, but the
meditator is separated
from them, bringing
immense joy and relief.

Sukha is Happiness, Not Pleasure



Sensual Happiness
(Kāmasukha)



Happiness of Peace
(Upasamasukha)



Nibbānic Happiness
(Where nothing is felt at all)

The Logical Flaw: If Sukha means gross physical 'pleasure', the Fourth Jhāna makes no sense, as it requires the abandoning of all feelings. It forces an unspiritual meaning onto the texts.

The Correction: The Buddha taught the pursuit of inner happiness. Happiness is a scalable word that perfectly spans from a child's ice cream to ultimate, feeling-less liberation.

The Four Steps of Composure

(The Standard Description)



Step 1: Separated & Thinking
Separated from unskillful qualities.
Accompanied by inner talk (thinking & considering).
Joy and happiness arise.

Step 2: Noble Silence & Poise
Quiescence of inner talk. Internal
illumination and mental poise.

Step 3: Equanimous Happiness
Dispassion for joy. The meditator is mindful,
fully aware, and abides happily.

Step 4: Purity of Equanimity.
Abandoning of happiness and
suffering. Purity of mindfulness.
Neither suffering nor happy.

The Translation Matrix: Reclaiming the Terminology

PALI TERM	ORTHODOX TRANSLATION	SUTTA TRANSLATION (This Framework)
Samādhi	Concentration	Composure (Collectedness)
Ekaggatā	One-pointedness	Stillness
Ekodibhāva	Unification	Poise (Equipoise)
Jhāna	Absorption / Trance	Meditation
Vivicca	Secluded	Separated
Vitakka & Vicāra	Initial/Sustained Application	Thinking & Considering
Sukha	Pleasure / Bliss	Happiness

Awakening in Everyday Life

The Paradigm Shift:
Meditation is not an escape into a paralyzed trance or a rigid attempt to force the mind into into a pinpoint.

The Reality:
It is the cultivation of a still, poised, and happy mind that can walk, listen, work, and live fully in the world.

We cannot change how others use these ancient words, but we can change how we understand them—transforming our practice from an escape from reality into a mastery of it.

The Jhāna Debate: Resolving the Confusion of Concentration

A historical shift in the meaning of 'jhāna' has led to two different meditative states sharing one name. The 'Original Map' (Pāli Suttas) describes a composed awareness necessary for liberation, while the 'Revised Map' (Visuddhimagga) details an optional deep mental absorption.

The Problem: Confusion in the Saṅgha

The original map describes a composed awareness necessary for liberation, while the revised map details an optional deep mental absorption.



Wrong View Leads to Failure

Wrong view leads to wrong liberation, resulting in tension, frustration, and worsened problems.



The Danger of Indulgence

"Absorption samadhi" can be harmful, meditators get stuck on the pleasant feeling and refuse to investigate reality. - Master Ajahn Chak.

The Linguistic Trap

Like the word "gay" changed from meaning "cheerful" to "homosexual," the word jhāna shifted from meaning "meditative" to "total mental absorption."

'Jhāna' shifted from meaning 'meditative awareness' to 'total mental absorption,' how words change meaning over time.

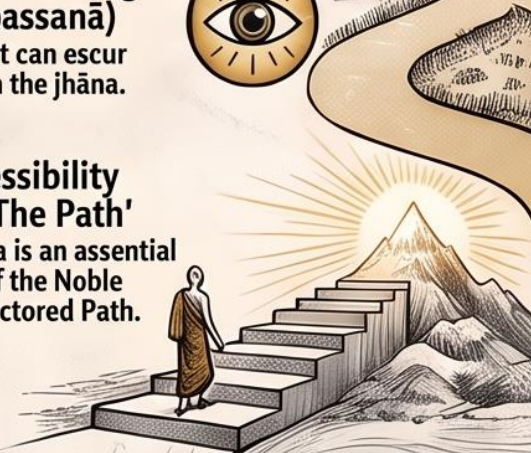
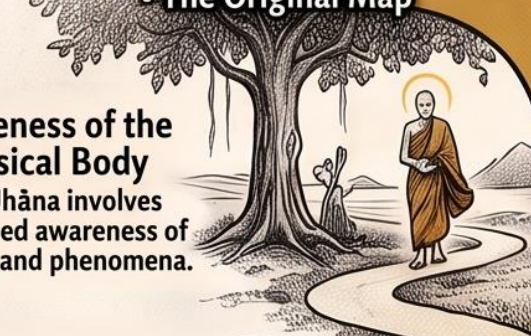
Sutta vs. Visuddhimagga: A Comparison

Pāli Suttas (Early Map) - The Original Map

Awareness of the Physical Body
Sutta Jhāna involves heightened awareness of the body and phenomena.

The Role of Insight (Vipassanā)
Insight can occur within the jhāna.

Accessibility and 'The Path'
Sutta Jhāna is an essential part of the Noble Eight-factored Path.

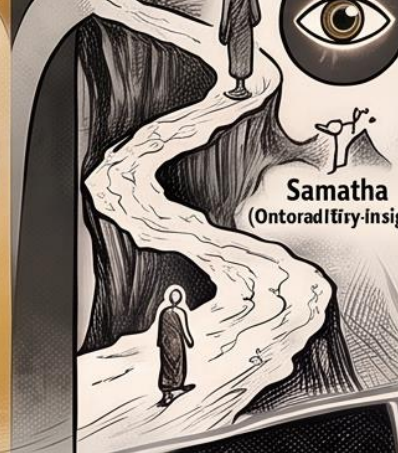
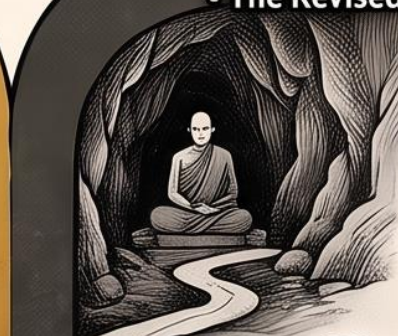


Visuddhimagga (Revised Map) - The Revised Map

No Experience of the Physical Body
Visuddhimagga Jhāna involves no experience of the physical body.

The Role of Insight (Vipassanā)
One must exit the jhāna to practice insight.

Accessibility and 'The Path'
Visuddhimagga Jhāna is often described as optional or "dry-insight" (sukkha-vipassanā), and is statistically reachable by fowl.



A Quick-Reference Guide

Pāli Suttas (Early Map)

Necessity: Necessary for liberation
Concentration Type: Unification of mind
Mental Effort: A 'mental culture' of cultivation
Sensory Input: Sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, objects
Movement: Focuses on moving or listening
Hindrances: Abandoned (Fahina)

Visuddhimagga (Revised Map)

Necessity: Optional (Secluded - ipeassita)
Concentration Type: Mac yarietisars on a mige cajast
Mental Effort: A 'mental state' of heed focus
Sensory Input: Hearing to reopended over off
Movement: Requires complete cultivation of the mind
Hindrances: Suppressed (Pikāmbhita)

Awakening While Listening

Many laypeople in the Suttas attained liberation just by listening to the Buddha; this is possible via Sutta Jhāna, but impossible via absorption.

RECLAIMING THE SUTTA PATH: FROM "ABSORPTION" TO "COMPOSURE"

ORTHODOX (STATIC) INTERPRETATION

One-Pointedness
Ekagga



Jhāna
Absorption
A mind citta cut off
from the senses



Samādhi
Concentration
Forced energy focusing on
a narrow point, strain



Ekodibhāva
Unification
All mental elements fused into
an undifferentiated block



Vitakka
Applied Thought



Sukha
Bliss / Pleasure



Leads to attempts to fix attention on a single
point, unconscious trance, exclusion of senses

SUTTA (COMPOSED) INTERPRETATION

Ekagga
Still

Jhāna is an Action,
Not just a State



Jhāna
Meditation
An active process, walking,
standing, sitting, and lying down



Samādhi
Composure
A state of being collected and
composed across the entire
being, without strain



Poise
A harmonious balance of
mental faculties



Vitakka
Thinking / Inner Talk
Inner talk to settle the mind



Sukha
Happiness
Covers full range from
sensual ease to Nibbāna



A state of active, composed awareness, abandon
hindrances, possible while moving or listening

THE 'NOBLE SILENCE' OF INNER TALK

1st Jhāna uses Vitakka
(thinking) and Vicāra
(considering), while only the
2nd Jhāna reaches Noble
Silence where mental
sound ceases

CORRECTING THE RESULT



Vivoka: "Separation" not "Seclusion"
with metaphorical "rain" of defilements



Enlightenment While Listening
Suttas show jhāna is not an "absorption" that cuts off senses



THE LENS OF INTERPRETATION



THE COMMENTARIAL LENS (ORTHODOXY)

Based on 5th-century Eynlon commentaries (Mairēvikīra), these interpretations view Suttas through a complex exegetical method that may not reflect the curliest Buddhist period.

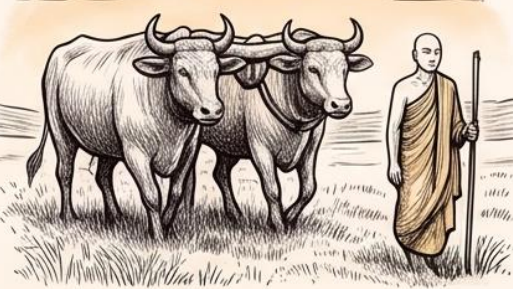


THE SUTTA LENS (RRIDINAL MEAHING)

Modern scholarship and digital access to Pāli texts allow for a "Irash reading" that hypasses later interpretations to find the Buddha's original intant.



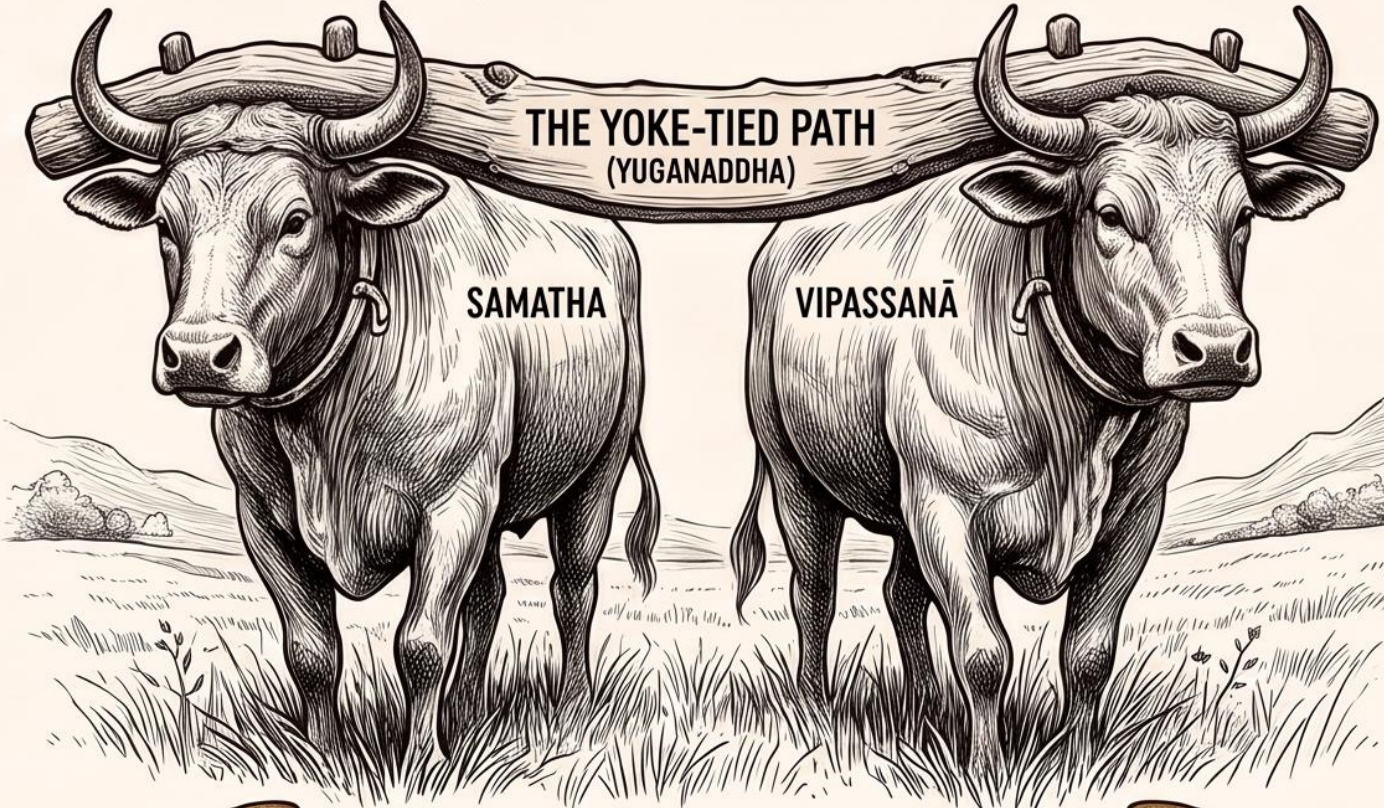
ORTHODOX VIEW: MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE
Orthodoxy cees Samatha (concentration) and Vipassanā (insight) as two separate, often incompatible modes of meditation.



SUTTA VIEW: YOKE-TIED (YUGANADDHA)
The Dottas describe these as two draft annuals joined by a yoke, working together as a team; they are essential qualities to be cultivated in tandom.

FROM CONCENTRATION TO COMPOSURE: RECLAIMING THE SUTTA MEANINGS

SAMATHA VS. VIPASSANĀ: THE YOKE-TIED PATH



THE YOKE-TIED PATH (YUGANADDHA)

SAMATHA

VIPASSANĀ

NEY FINDING: Samathe Maeus "Settling" – Outside of meditation, the word refere to settling dlspetes or "resting"; in meditation, it is cotosomathe– the settling of the mind.

TRANSLATION COMPARISON

Pāli Term	Common (Orthodox) Translation	Proposed (Sutta) Translation
Vipassanā	Concentration Meditation	Settling / Mental Settling
Samādhī	Concentration	Composure / Coliestedness
Ekaggatā	One-pointedness	Stillness / One-placedness
Pīti	Rapture / Exstasy	Juy
Pāmojja	Juy	Gladness

SAMĀDHĪ: COMPOSURE VS. CONCENTRATION



THE MISLEADING "CONCENTRATION"
Monten "concentration" implisa fiving attaction on a single dot er chject, which often creates tencion, fofigue, and a "diseonnest" from the five senses.

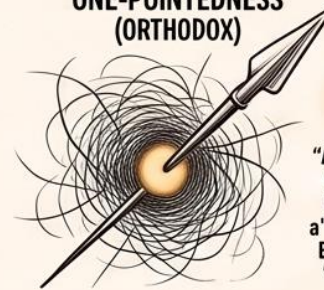


SAMĀDHĪ AS "COMPOSURE"
Etymologically, Xembūshori mōons to "pot together" or "campeaa." it is the state of a mind that is collected, stable, and unified, rather than just focused.

SUPPORTING FACT: Ivalusion, flot Exclusion – Sutta-based Samādhī requires being tolerant of the five senses (sound, faste, etc.) rather than shoting them off.

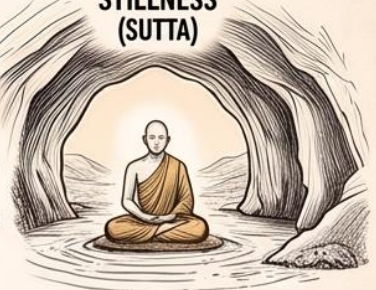
EKAGGATĀ: THE MYTH OF 'ONE-POINTEDNESS'

ONE-POINTEDNESS (ORTHODOX)



Interpreted as focusing on a "spatially limited location" (like the tip of the noce), which can feel congested and foreefol.

STILLNESS (SUTTA)



A "one-placed" mind is simply a still mind that isn't "ail over the place", it feels spacious, epen, and cool.

"AGGA"

KEY FINDING:
"Agga" Masne Place, Not Point – is the futton, Agga huns a "place" or "shetier," Ebegetti to Placelfy "and-placedvese".

OUTCOMES OF PRACTICE



THE "STONE-IN-THE-HEAD" SYNDROME
A result of effortfol, panetrative concentration that leads to mental tonsion and headache.



PLIANT AND MALLEABLE MIND
A trelly sompoxed mind (anmihile stite) io described in the Dottax os nrēdubhāte— colt, flexible, and ready for ineight.



The Chiaroscuro of Translation

*Reclaiming the original meaning of Buddhist
meditation from the shadows of orthodoxy.*

The Source

The Early Suttas
(The original teachings).

The Shadow

(5th Century)

Orthodoxy & Commentaries
(*Visuddhimagga*). Pioneering English
translators relied heavily on
these later texts.

The Awakening

(20th Century - Present)

Internet and critical scholarship
allow direct access to early texts,
cracking the commentarial lens.



“Translations cannot convey the
original perfectly. Translators
are influenced by existing
interpretations—perhaps more
than they admit.”

Two Paradigms of Practice

Orthodox / *Visuddhimagga* Lens

Core Concept: Meditation as
'Concentration'.

Goal: Absorption & sensory
disconnection.

Method: Forceful, undivided
attention to a single
localized point.

Early Sutta Lens

Core Concept: Meditation as
'Composure'.

Goal: Stability, clear
comprehension, and vision
according to reality.

Method: Settling the mind
while maintaining sensory
tolerance.

The Myth of Mutually Exclusive Paths

The Orthodox Myth

Samatha (Concentration) and Vipassanā (Insight) are seen as mutually exclusive practices.

The Sutta Reality

They are essential qualities cultivated together as a single, unified team.

Three Valid Modes of Cultivation:

1. *Samatha-preceded*, 2. *Vipassanā-preceded*, 3. *Yoke-tied*

The “Yoke-Tied” Allegory (*Yuganaddha*)

Samatha
(Mental Settling)

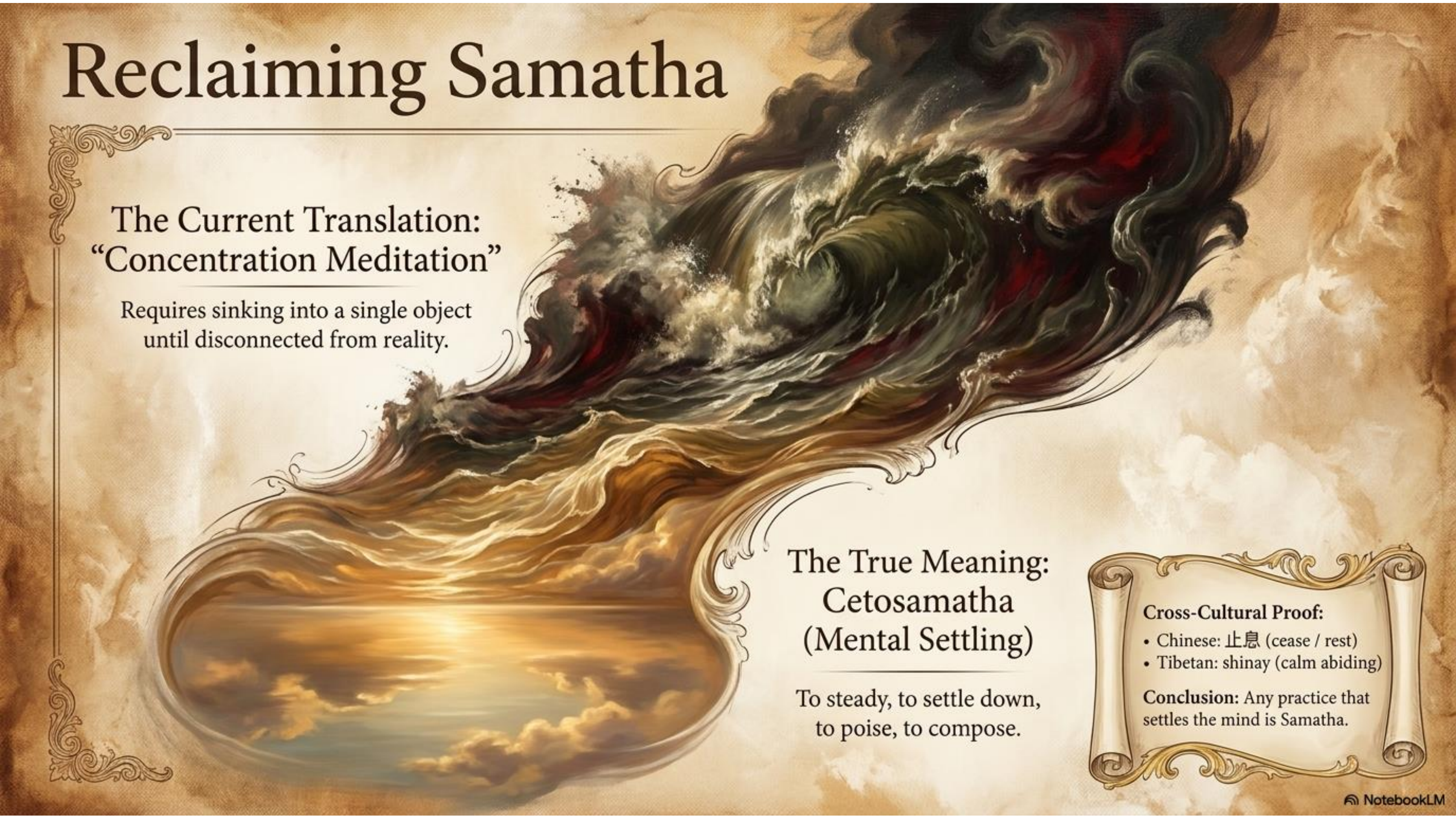


Vipassanā
(Distinct Seeing)

*A stable gear joining
two forces into a
single, unified team.*

The Takeaway: *Commentaries claim these practices “alternate.”
But two yoked oxen cannot move alternately. They must move
simultaneously, knowing and seeing phenomena according to reality.*

Reclaiming Samatha

A dramatic painting of a stormy sea. In the foreground, dark, swirling waves in shades of black, dark green, and deep red crash against a lighter, turbulent sky. The waves are depicted with dynamic, swirling brushstrokes. In the background, a calm horizon line separates the dark sea from a bright, hazy sky filled with soft, white clouds. A bright light source, likely the sun or moon, is visible on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow across the scene. The overall composition is split horizontally, with the dark, chaotic sea above and the calm, bright sky below.

The Current Translation: “Concentration Meditation”

Requires sinking into a single object
until disconnected from reality.

The True Meaning: Cetosamatha (Mental Settling)

To steady, to settle down,
to poise, to compose.

Cross-Cultural Proof:

- Chinese: 止息 (cease / rest)
- Tibetan: shinay (calm abiding)

Conclusion: Any practice that
settles the mind is Samatha.

The “Concentration” Paradox



1 The Danger of “Concentration”

English definitions imply focused, undivided physical effort, frequently leading to tension, fatigue, and stressful striving.

2 The Penetration Myth

Later translations encourage forcefully spearing the object of attention to ‘penetrate’ the truth—turning meditation into exhausting labor.

3 The Reality

Truth is penetrated by discernment, not brute mental force. The Suttas describe a composed mind as pliant, flexible, and soft—never rigid.

Decoding Samādhi

SAMĀDHI

Sam = Together

ā

dahati = Put / Place

To put together = To compose

Samāhita (participle): Composed, collected.

The Translation Shift: Samādhi = Composure or Collectedness.

‘Composure fits perfectly into the Suttas without importing the stressful baggage of ‘Concentration’.

The Sensory Deprivation Error

The Error

Believing that Samādhi requires shutting oneself off in total silence, treating all sense objects as “disturbances.”

The Checklist of Tolerance:
Visual forms, Sounds,
Odours, Tastes,
Physical sensations.

The Reality

Proper composure requires sensory tolerance. “Sound is just sound.” If areas of awareness are blocked off, all-around insight is impossible.

The Fiction of 'One-Pointedness'

The Term: *Ekaggatā*

Commonly mistranslated as
“one-pointedness”.

The Flawed Logic

Eka (One) + *Agga* (Point?)
+ *Tā* (Ness).

The Linguistic Problem

In Pāli, “agga” literally means the tip or top of something (like the top of a tree). It does NOT mean a spatially limited dot. “One-tip-ness” makes no sense.

The Resulting Error

Meditators try to force attention onto a tiny physical location, creating a contracted, congested, and tense mental posture.

The True Meaning of Agga

The Forgotten Meaning:
“Agga” is a contracted form of “agāra”,
which means a hall, shelter, or place.

The True Translation:
Eka (One) + Agga (Place) + Tā (Ness)
= “One-placedness”.

The Idiomatic Translation: Stillness
Definition: A mind that is not scattered,
messy, or “all over the place,” but gathered,
collected, and completely still.

The “Feel” Experiment

Read and notice the cognitive reality each phrase creates in your mind.



One-pointedness of mind—
this is concentration.

Resulting Feeling: Hard, forceful,
congested, tense, striving.



Stillness of mind—
this is composure.

Resulting Feeling: Firm, relaxed,
spacious, open, calm.

The specific words we use dictate the
cognitive reality of our meditation.

The Grand Synthesis

Pāli Term	Orthodox Translation	New (Sutta) Translation	Mental Effect
Samatha	Concentration Meditation	Mental Settling	Rest & Calm
Samādhi	Concentration	Composure / Collectedness	Stability & Clarity
Ekaggatā	One-pointedness	Stillness / One-placedness	Spaciousness
Vipassanā	Mutually exclusive path	Distinct seeing (Yoke-tied)	Insight

The Canvas of the Composed Mind

*Awakening is not achieved by spearing the mind with force,
nor by retreating into sensory darkness.*

By letting go of 5th-century shadows, we return to the original path. When the mind is allowed to settle into profound composure and stillness, it naturally becomes clear, enabling vision and knowledge according to reality.





THE HEROIC MINDSCAPE

Reforging the Map of Jhāna
through the Early Suttas

Words Shape Reality: The Translation Trap

The Orthodox Map



For centuries, orthodox Theravāda translations have framed meditation as a static, disconnected trance. Practitioners strive for a rigid 'absorption' that stifles natural awareness.

The Result: Whatever we think meditation should be, we will try to make it so. If we think it should be 'one-pointed', we will try to do that... I was told someone actually did that in walking meditation. She closed her eyes to concentrate... and bumped into a wall.

The Sutta Map



Takeaway: A mistranslated map leads to a dead end. To reclaim the practice, we must decode the original Pāli terminology.

The Master Matrix: A Paradigm Shift in Terminology

Pāli Term	Orthodox Translation	Sutta Translation (Dynamic)
Samādhi	Concentration	Composure / Collectedness
Ekagga	One-Pointed	Still
Ekodibhāva	Unification	Poise (Mental Poise)
Jhāna	Absorption / Trance	Meditation (Action)
Vitakka & Vicāra	Initial & Sustained Application	Thinking & Considering
Sukha	Pleasure / Bliss	Happiness
Vivicca	Secluded / Cut-off	Having Separated

Ekagga: From Rigid Fixation to Dynamic Stillness



"One-Pointed" (Orthodox)

Demands exclusive attention on a spatially limited location (e.g., nose tip, moving foot).
Creates a hazardous disconnect from reality.
Defilements can still arise unnoticed in the periphery.



"Still" (Sutta)

A complex mind-eye-body coordination.
The mind remains perfectly still and composed while moving about (carato).

**"Abide in the body as body-observers, ardent, fully aware, poised... composed, still-minded."
(Sāla Sutta, SN47.4)**

Ekodibhāva: The Mastery of Mental Poise

Eka
(Equal/Same)
+
Odhi
(Inside/Holding)
=
Equal-Inside-Holding
=
Equipoised / Poised

Orthodox texts translate this as “unification of mind.”

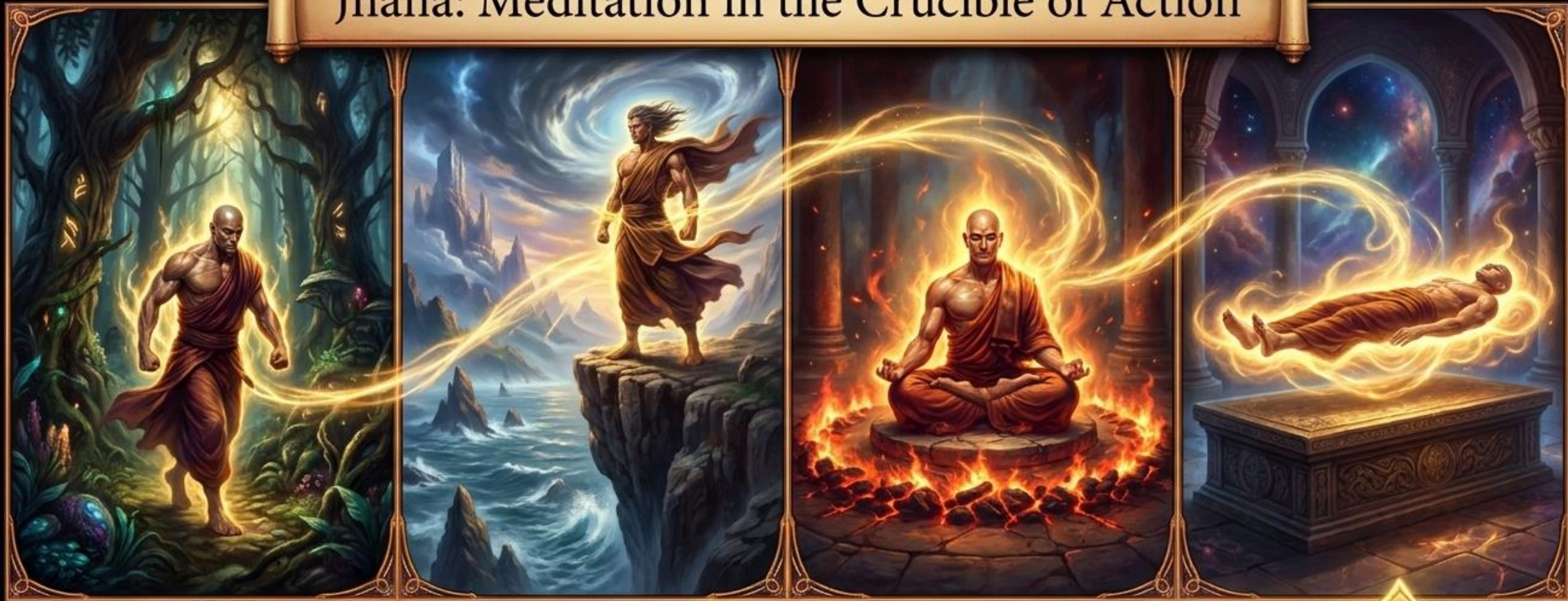
But you cannot unify something that is already a single entity.

The Suttas describe people with this quality.

A person cannot be “unified,” but they can be impeccably poised.

Key Insight: True mental poise is a dignified, self-confident balance—a steadiness hovering perfectly between rest and motion.

Jhāna: Meditation in the Crucible of Action



Jhāna translates literally to 'meditation'—an active verb (*jhāyati*), not a paralyzed mental state ('absorption'). The *Suttas* (Venāgapura Sutta, AN3.63) explicitly state that Jhāna is engaged while living one's life in all four postures:

1. Walking (*caṅkamāmi*)
2. Standing
3. Sitting
4. Lying down

"Walking not only does not interfere with real samādhi, it's a way of practice where samādhi can arise."

— Ajahn Chah

Vitakka & Vicāra: Harnessing the Inner Voice

Orthodox texts define these as “initial and sustained application” to an object.

The Suttas define them simply as Thinking and Considering.

The Mechanic:

When the mind is uncollected, it is tossed around by thoughts.

In the 1st Jhāna, we don’t silence the mind—we use self-talk (*yoniso manasikāra*) to establish mindfulness, much like a bicyclist pedaling to build momentum.

“First having thought, having considered, one then breaks into speech; therefore thinking and considering are verbal fabrication.” (Cūḷavedalla Sutta)

NE 4E 半

- Thinking and considering quieten entirely.
- The mind enters true internal illumination and mental poise.
- "Attaining no-thinking, the disciple is endowed with noble silence straightaway." (Theragāthā 14.1)

- Accompanied by thinking (*vitakka*) and considering (*vicāra*).
- Creates 'mental sound' (*vitakkavipphārasaddam*).
- Externally silent, but internally vocal.

Sukha: The Grand Spectrum of Happiness

Translating *sukha* strictly as “pleasure” or “bliss” creates a paradox. The 4th Jhāna explicitly abandons “pleasure” to achieve pure equanimity—yet it is still categorized as *sukha*.



Sensual (*Kāmasukha*)
Dependent on the five senses.



Meditation (*Jhāna sukha*)
Contented, peaceful, born of
separation and composure.



Ultimate (*Nibbāna sukha*)
“Just that is the *sukha* here, my friend:
where there is nothing felt.” (AN9.34)

Conclusion: *Sukha* must be translated as “Happiness”—a container large enough to hold everything from worldly delight to the ultimate peace of feeling nothing at all.



Vivicca: The Shield of Separation

ॠ ॡ ॢ ॣ । ॥ ० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९

Vivicca is widely translated as “secluded” or “cut off.” But in Jhāna, one is not blind or immune to the presence of subtler defilements.

“It’s like holding a big umbrella to protect yourself from the rain. Just because you don’t get wet doesn’t mean there’s no rain. Being sheltered, the mind is joyful!”

The Mechanic (Having Separated):

- You observe with a distinct sense of separation (viveka).
- Sensualities can still occur in the periphery, but the observer feels separate from them, untainted and objective.



Synthesis: The Four Meditations Remapped



Tier 3: Dispassion for joy. Abiding equanimously, mindful, fully aware.

Tier 4: Abandoning of happiness and suffering. Purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither suffering nor happy.

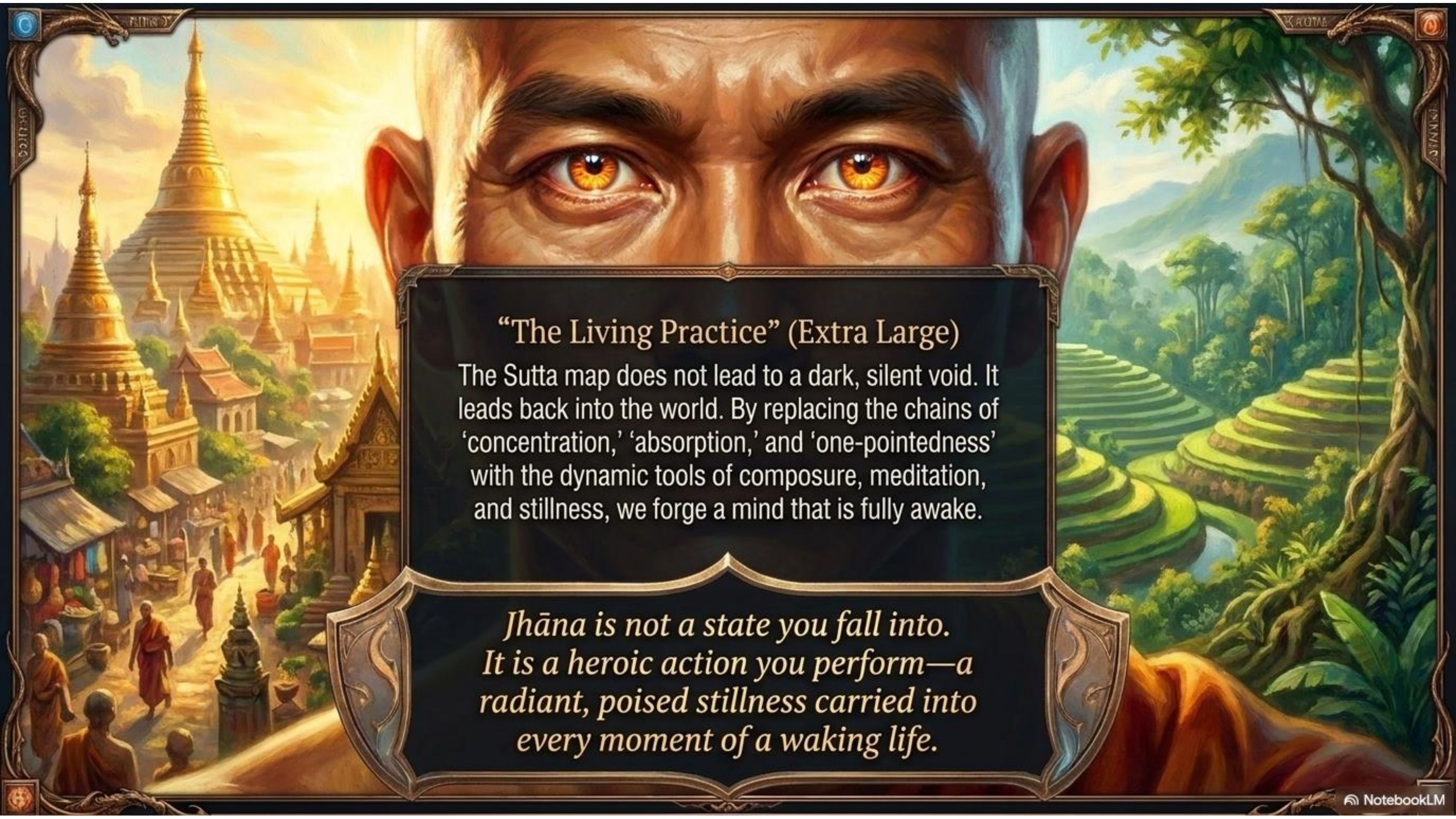


Tier 2: Quiescence of thinking & considering. Internal illumination, mental poise, born of composure.



Tier 1: Joy & happiness born of separation, accompanied by thinking and considering.





“The Living Practice” (Extra Large)

The Sutta map does not lead to a dark, silent void. It leads back into the world. By replacing the chains of ‘concentration,’ ‘absorption,’ and ‘one-pointedness’ with the dynamic tools of composure, meditation, and stillness, we forge a mind that is fully awake.

*Jhāna is not a state you fall into.
It is a heroic action you perform—a
radiant, poised stillness carried into
every moment of a waking life.*



The Quest for True Samādhi and the Controversy of Jhāna

A visual guide to resolving the oldest and most damaging
dispute in Theravāda Buddhist meditation.



The Confused

Paralyzed by contradicting instructions from revered teachers regarding the necessity of deep states of concentration.

The Worried

Practicing successfully, but harboring persistent anxiety that they are missing out on an essential, esoteric requirement for Awakening.

The Stagnant

Successfully achieving intense states of mental absorption, yet failing to mature spiritually or break free from actual suffering.

The central dispute over the necessity of Jhāna

The Suttas

Verdict: YES

It is absolutely necessary.

Evidence: The four jhānas are explicitly defined as Sammā-samādhi (Right Concentration), an inseparable component of the Noble Eight-factored Path.

Modern Masters

Verdict: NO

It is unnecessary and potentially dangerous.

Evidence: Ajahn Chah warns: That which can be most harmful to the meditator is absorption samādhi (jhāna)... We just get stuck on that happiness.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya notes: We don't need jhānic samādhi.

Master Sheng Yen completely dismisses entering absorbed states.

The elephant in the room is a phantom

The conflict stems entirely from an illusion of language.

The conflict stems entirely from an illusion of language. The two camps are separated by centuries and geography. Though both use the exact word **Jhāna**, they are pointing to two completely distinct meditative realities. By untangling the semantic drift, the contradiction instantly evaporates.

Words fundamentally shift their meaning across centuries

The Analogy

Past

Gay = Happy and cheerful.

Present

Gay = Homosexual.

Note: If someone from the past says "I feel gay," applying the modern definition creates total confusion.

The Reality

Early Canon (Suttas)

Jhāna = A state of mental unification and flowing action.

5th Century (Commentaries)

Jhāna = Complete sensory absorption and fixed trance.

Note: Modern Theravāda adopted the 5th-century definition. Reading the Suttas with this modern definition creates the current dispute.



The Original Map

Source: *The Pāli Suttas* (Early Buddhism)

Key Trait: Defines Jhāna as a highly accessible mental action that forms the core of the Noble Eightfold Path.



The Revised Map

Source: *The Visuddhimagga* (5th-century orthodox post-canonical Theravāda)

Key Trait: Redefines Jhāna as an optional, supremely difficult state of complete sensory deprivation.

The Structural Difference: Necessity and Attainability



Suttas

Role on the Path
Strictly Necessary.
Explicitly part of the Noble
Eight-factored Path.

Core Nature

A mental action and flowing
unification of mind.

Attainability and Effort

Accessible utilizing the first seven
path-factors as requisites.



Visuddhimagga

Role on the Path
Optional. The sukkha-vipassaka
(dry-insight worker) can
achieve awakening without it.

Core Nature

A fixed mental state locked onto
a single conceptual object.

Attainability and Effort

Extremely difficult. The commentary
itself notes an optimistic success rate
of 1 in 1,000,000 practitioners.

The Experiential Difference: Body, Sound, and Insight



Suttas



Heightened experience
of the physical body.
Movement is possible.



Hearing is not suspended.
Sound is fully present.



Insight practice naturally
occurs within the
state of Jhāna.



Visuddhimagga

Zero experience of
the physical body.

Hearing is totally suspended.
Total isolation from
external phenomena.

Insight is impossible within
the state; it must occur
after exiting Jhāna.

The Revised Map demands absolute sensory exclusion

The *Visuddhimagga* defines Jhāna as *Appanā* (fixed samādhi)

The Focus

Persistent, intense focus on a singular visual or tactile object (*nimitta*).

The Mechanism

Complete suppression (*vikkhambhita*) of hindrances through overwhelming concentration



The Danger

Prime territory for Spiritual Bypass. Because it forcibly cuts off sensory perception, meditators become attached to the blissful escape, halting the actual investigation of suffering. This is the exact state the modern masters warn against.

The Original Map guides a fluid, fully aware unification

The Suttas define *Jhāna* as a *Flowing Samādhi* rather than an absorption trance.

The Focus

The act of meditation itself, not a fixed external object.

The object can change as refinement increases.



The Mechanism

Hindrances are actively abandoned (*pahīna*), not forcefully suppressed.



The Integration

Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) leads directly into this state.

Because the mind is settled but the senses remain open, defilements are easily seen and insight naturally arises within the flow.

Solving the “Awakening While Listening” historical puzzle

The Mystery

The Suttas frequently record laypeople—with zero meditation experience—achieving spiritual awakening simply by listening to the Buddha speak.

How is this possible if reaching a trance-like absorption is mandatory for awakening?



The Resolution

It is impossible under the Visuddhimagga rules, which dictate that hearing is suspended in Jhāna.

But under the Original Map, Sutta Jhāna does not require sensory shutdown.

These laypeople entered the unified, flowing state of Jhāna through the very act of deep, attentive listening.

Two maps for a single topographical reality

Original Map (*Suttas*)
points to the Main Path:

This is Jhāna.
It is the route itself.

Samatha-Vipassanā
Route

The Steep Climb
(Absorption)

Revised Map
(*Visuddhimagga*)
points to the
Red Detour:

This steep detour is
Jhāna. You don't have to
take it to reach the top,
but the view is nice.



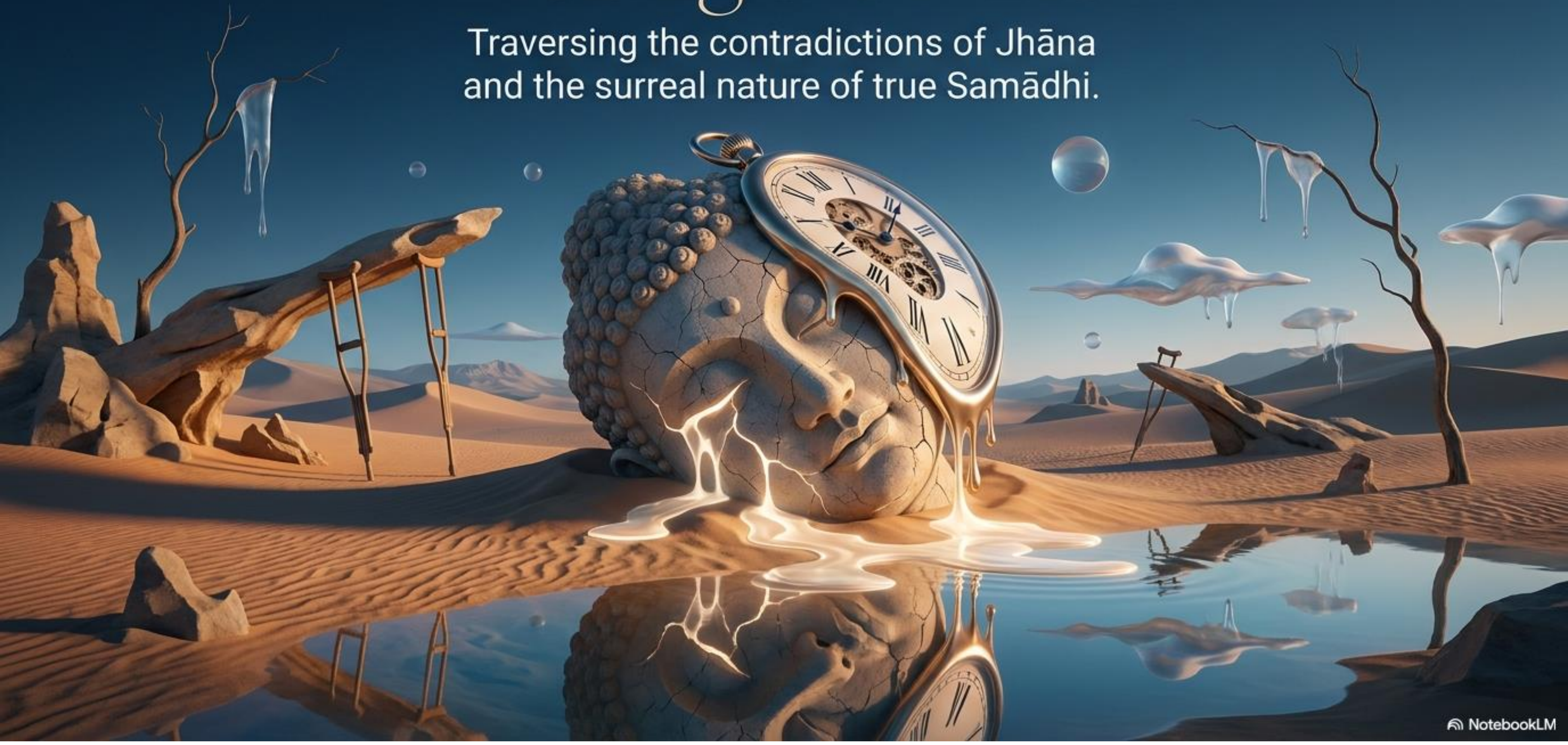
Proceeding with absolute clarity on the path

The contradictions dissolve when we recognize our conditioned definitions. The great modern masters who teach Vipassanā are actually guiding students toward the original Sutta Jhāna—they simply avoid the word to prevent students from seeking the 5th-century trance.

The Final Takeaway: When wise teachers warn against Jhāna, they are warning against the detour of absorption, not the Noble Eightfold Path. You are now equipped with the true map. The path is open.

Melting the Mind

Traversing the contradictions of Jhāna
and the surreal nature of true Samādhi.



The Jungle of Contradictory Teachings

Buddhist teachings on meditation are filled with irreconcilable contradictions regarding *jhāna*. When faced with this maze, practitioners typically wander down one of three dead ends:

1. The Dogmatist

Clinging to a singular view
("Only this is true; anything
otherwise is hollow").

2. The Defeatist

Concluding the path is
obscured, resigning to wait
for the next Buddha.

3. The Scholar

Endlessly researching
unprovable assumptions
to ascertain the 'earliest'
teaching.

The Ultimate Litmus Test of the Kālāmas

The Kālāma Sutta offers the only way out of the maze:
examine the result when a teaching is put into practice.

The Core Question
Does this practice allow
us to fully know and
comprehend dukkha
(suffering) directly for
ourselves?

The Rejection
Do not blindly go by
tradition, scripture, logical
conjecture, or the charisma
of a teacher. Let your own
progress inform the way.

Nibbāna as an Evaporation

Nibbāna is not a mystical realm to be forced into existence; it is an evaporation.



The *Nibbānapaṇhā Sutta* defines it simply:

The evaporation of passion,
the evaporation of aversion,
the evaporation of delusion.

The 3-to-5 Year Audit:

Look back at your life 3 to 5 years ago. When meeting undesirable situations, are you less angry, afraid, jealous, and stubborn?

If defilements have not lessened—or have grown—the practice must be re-evaluated.

The Grand Dichotomy of Jhāna

Visuddhimagga Style (Rigid)

Core Mechanism:
Penetrative Concentration.

Mental State: Complete
Absorption (sensory inputs
forcibly blocked).

Vulnerability: Fragile.
Disruption causes jarring,
violent friction.

Sutta Style (Fluid)

Core Mechanism: Fluid
Composure & Letting Go.

Mental State: Heightened,
expansive awareness.

Resilience: Creates a natural
buffer effect against hindrances.

The Translation Trap

The English translation of the Pāli term *Samādhi* fundamentally alters the trajectory of the mind.

Composure

The True Translation:
Composure or Collectedness
(Implies stillness, balanced
awareness, letting go, remaining
unprovoked).

The False Translation: Concentration
(Implies fixing undivided attention,
grasping an object, applying tension,
shutting out the world).

The Mirage of Intense Focus

Concentration is a mundane mental ability, not inherently spiritual.
Anyone can concentrate intensely on what they desire or hate.

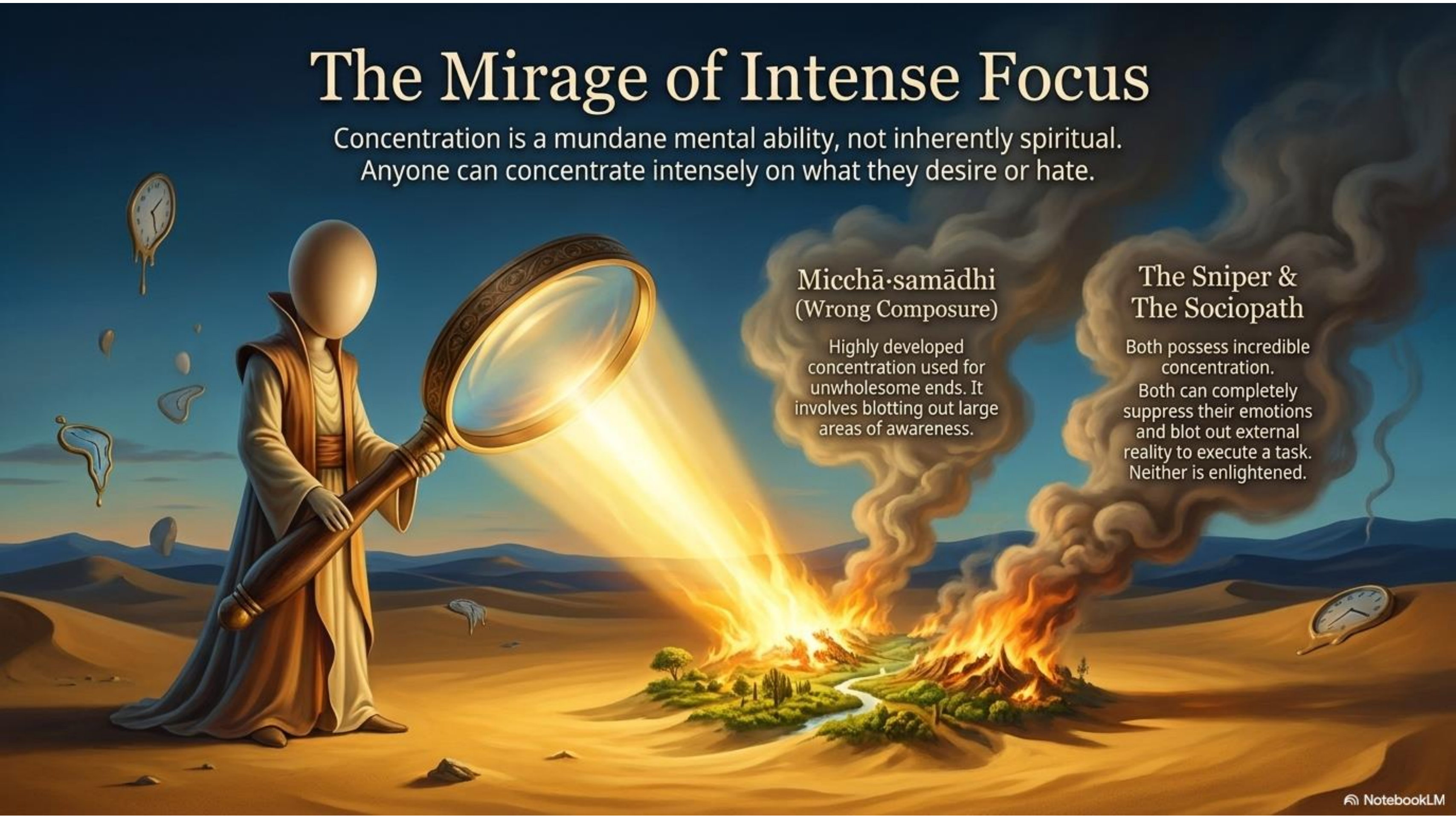
Micchā-samādhi (Wrong Composure)

Highly developed concentration used for unwholesome ends. It involves blotting out large areas of awareness.

The Sniper & The Sociopath

Both possess incredible concentration.

Both can completely suppress their emotions and blot out external reality to execute a task. Neither is enlightened.



The Architecture of a Blowup

How forcing “undivided attention” creates a psychological pressure cooker:



Case Studies in Rigidity



The Volcano

A practitioner heavily attached to blissful sensory deprivation flies into a murderous, uncontrollable rage simply because her daughter slammed a door.

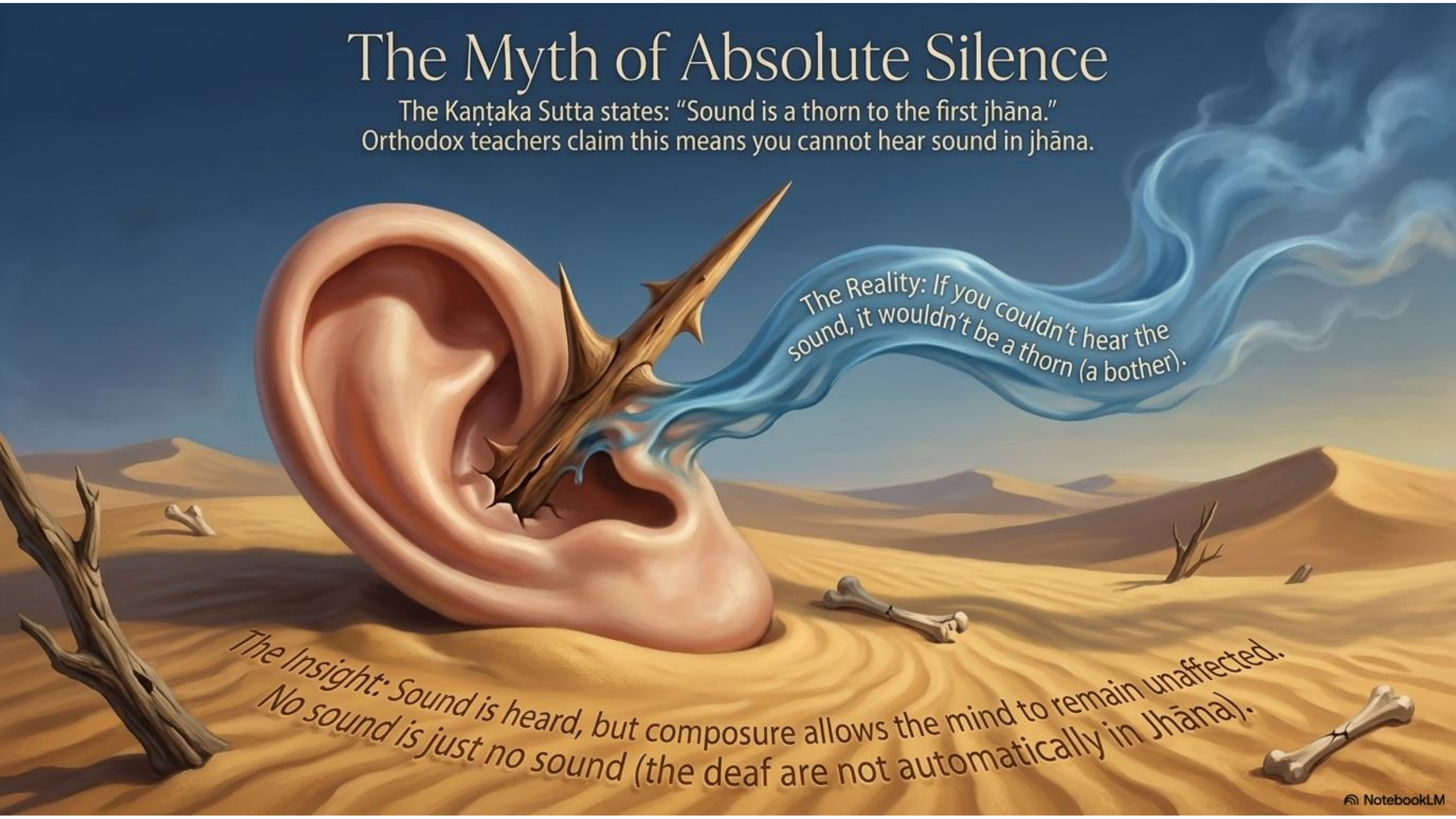


The Tension Trap

The author's own experience forcing penetrative concentration resulted in severe facial muscle spasms, physical paralysis, and chronic insomnia requiring psychotropic drugs to resolve.

The Myth of Absolute Silence

The Kaṇṭaka Sutta states: "Sound is a thorn to the first jhāna."
Orthodox teachers claim this means you cannot hear sound in jhāna.



The Reality: If you couldn't hear the sound, it wouldn't be a thorn (a bother).

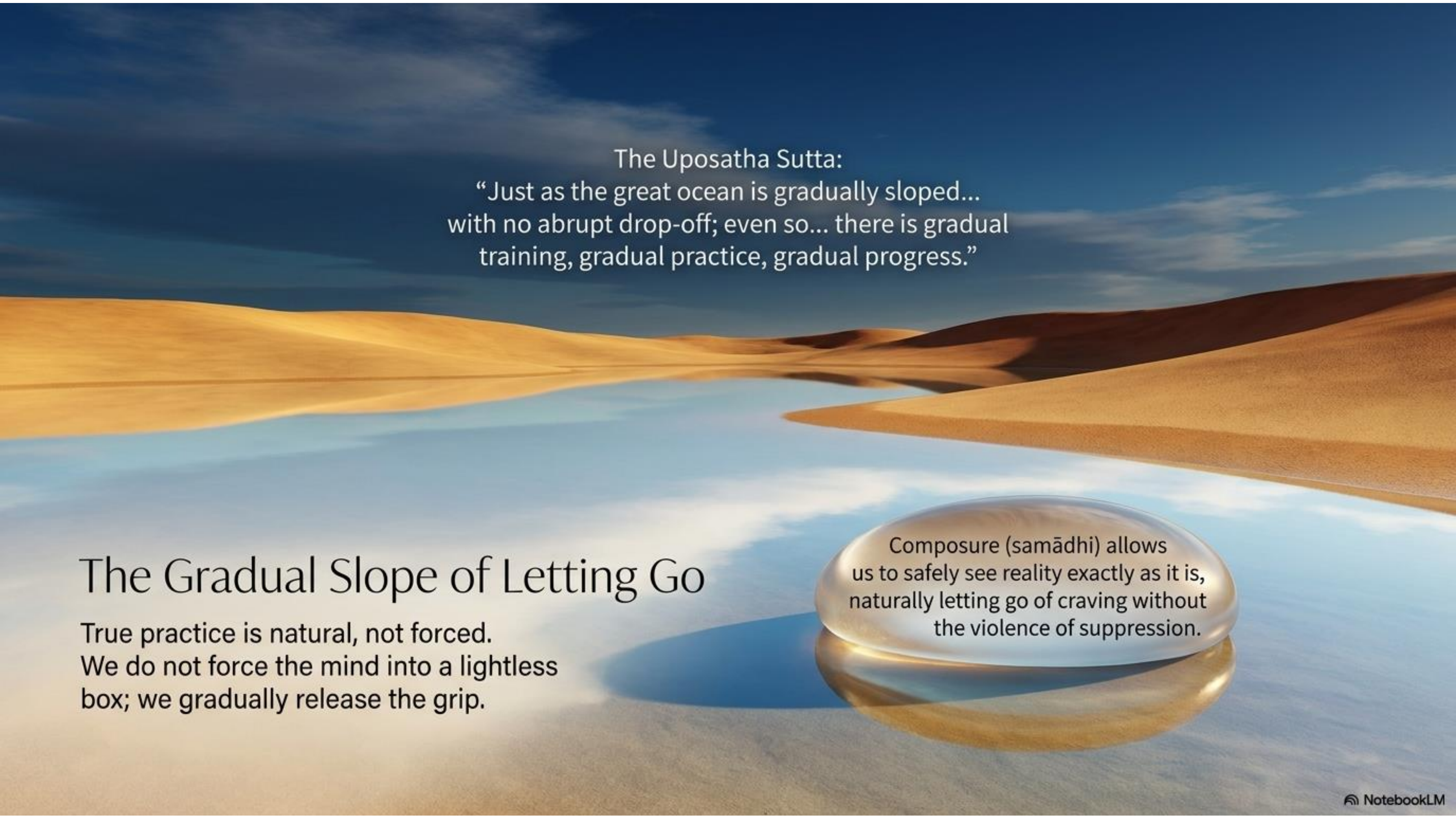
*The Insight: Sound is heard, but composure allows the mind to remain unaffected.
No sound is just no sound (the deaf are not automatically in Jhāna).*

The Dashboard of True Dhamma

According to the Saṅkhitta Sutta, true practice must categorically lead to these 8 qualities.



- Dispassion (not passion)
- Being unfettered (not fettered)
- Shedding (not accumulating)
- Modesty (not self-aggrandizement)
- Contentment (not discontent)
- Seclusion (not entanglement)
- Aroused persistence (not laziness)
- Being unburdensome (not burdensome)



The Uposatha Sutta:
“Just as the great ocean is gradually sloped...
with no abrupt drop-off; even so... there is gradual
training, gradual practice, gradual progress.”

The Gradual Slope of Letting Go

True practice is natural, not forced.
We do not force the mind into a lightless
box; we gradually release the grip.

Composure (samādhi) allows
us to safely see reality exactly as it is,
naturally letting go of craving without
the violence of suppression.

Stepping Out of the Dream



3. Re-read the Texts

Avoid the lightest texts and fluffy stuff with this one. Read them out as if you were for the first time, but as if you were a professional, collected composure.

2. Discuss Civilly

Share those concepts, but do not quarrel. If you run into a disagreement, seek to understand the other's viewpoint first.

1. Test the Translation

Mentally replace the command to "concentrate" with the invitation to "find composure." Observe the difference in your physical tension.

Illumination in Stillness

Reclaiming the Original Sutta Jhāna
from Modern Misinterpretation



The *Visuddhimagga* & Orthodox View

Jhāna is a profound,
frozen trance.

The mind is entirely
detached from the
physical senses.

It is a passive state
to be entered.



The Original *Sutta* View

Jhāna literally means
meditation.

It is the active, fluid
engagement of a
heightened mind.

Sensations and
discernment remain
present.

The Common Translation

Heightened mental state.

(Implies a static mental room you get locked inside).

ābhicetasikā

The Literal Translation

abhi (heightened) + *ceto* (mind) + *ika* (belonging to)

Meditations belonging to a heightened mind.

Jhāna is an action (*kamma*), a mental work that one actively engages in, not a passive state that happens to you.

The “Room” Model (Incorrect)



Translating *upasampajja viharati* as “enters upon and abides in.”



The “Practice” Model (Correct)



Translating *upasampajja viharati* as “abides engaging in.”

We do not “enter” Jhāna like a room. We engage in it like a practice.
You can even abide engaging in Jhāna while walking.

Two Different Conceptions of Jhāna

	Sutta Jhāna	<i>Visuddhimagga</i> Jhāna
Nature of Experience	An action or meditation	An absorption or trance
Scope of Awareness	Whole-body awareness	Single mental object
Sensory Input	Thoughts and physical sensations can occur	Five senses are completely cut off
Role in Liberation	Essential part of the path to awakening	Optional for liberation

The Original Suttas

The Suttas seamlessly blend Samatha (settling) and Vipassanā (distinct seeing).

Post-Canonical Texts (e.g., Visuddhimagga)

Redefined Jhāna purely as deep absorption, creating a glaring contradiction with the Suttas regarding how awakening happens.

The Modern Invention

To fix the contradiction without rejecting the elders, modern Theravāda invented **two new terms** not found in the Suttas: “Samatha Jhāna” and “Vipassanā Jhāna”.

Samatha
Jhāna

Vipassanā
Jhāna

The Orthodox View (*Vibhaṅga*)

Concentrating exclusively on the breathing sensation at the nose-tip. Often creates physical tension.



The *Sutta* Instruction

parimukham
(establishing mindfulness completely in front)

sabba-kāyapaṭisaṁvedī
(sensitive to the entire body).

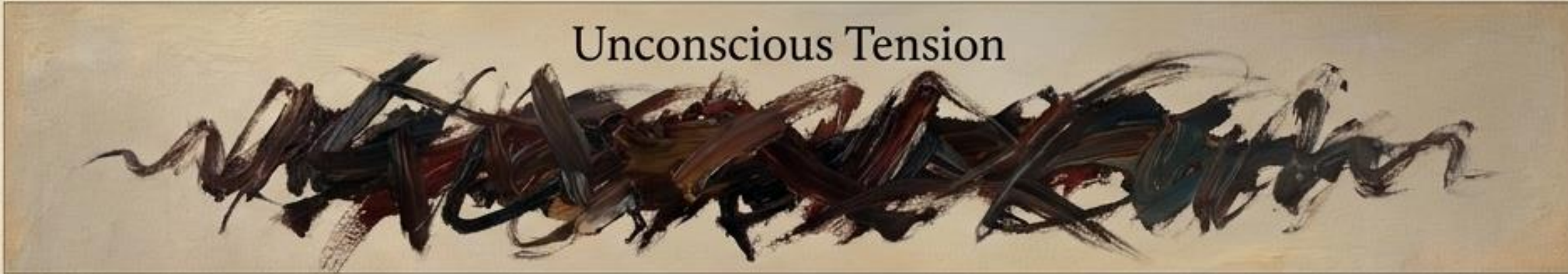
Experiencing breathing as part of experiencing the whole physical form.

Calming the Bodily Fabrication (*kāyasaṅkhāra*)

The commentary glosses *kāyasaṅkhāra* simply as “in-and-out breathing.”

This is incomplete. It means “fabrication of effort by the body.”

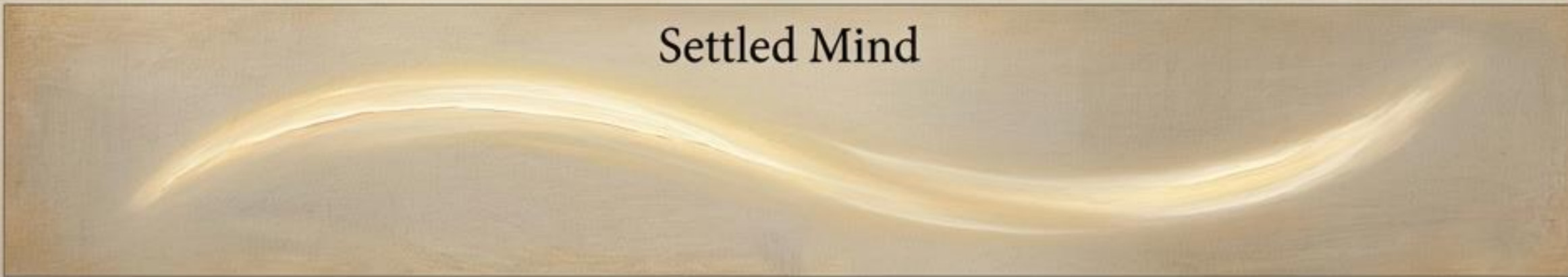
Unconscious Tension



Progressive Letting Go



Settled Mind



The instruction is not to force the breath into a microscopic point. The instruction is to become conscious of unconscious bodily efforting and progressively let it go.

The Visual Myth

The assumption that a *nimitta* (sign of concentration) must be a bright visual disk to enter Jhāna.



The Tactile Reality

Even within the *Visuddhimagga*, *nimittas* can be tactile: the light touch of cotton, silk, or a gentle draft.

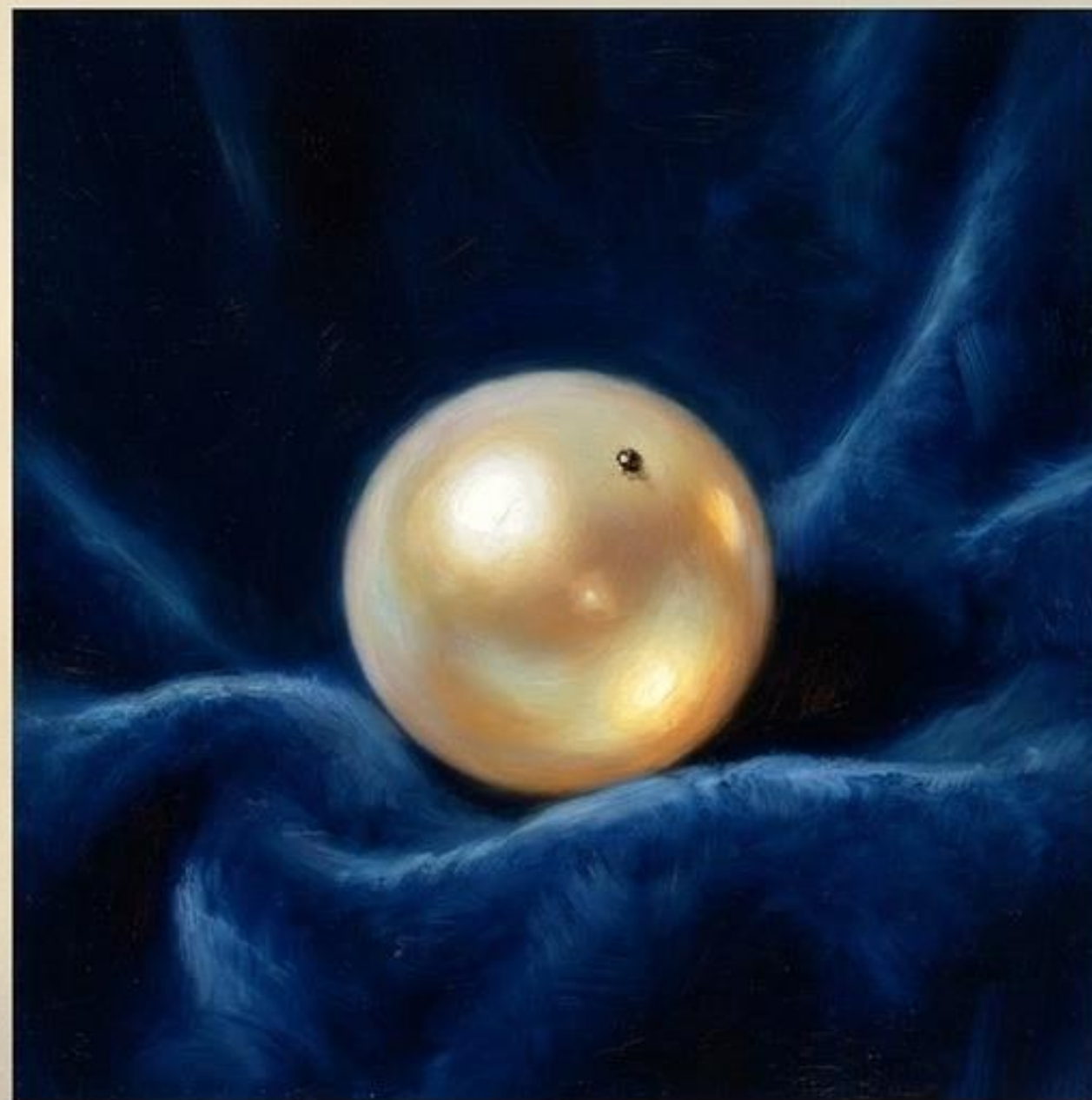
Do not mistake profound tactile composure for a lack of progress.



The Persistence of Defilements

The Myth

Entering Jhāna temporarily suppresses all defilements completely.



The Reality

Subtle unskillful qualities can and do arise concurrently. Subtle influences (desire, sense of self) can still occur and even knock a practitioner out of the meditation.

True Jhāna is not a bulletproof shield. It requires continuous discernment, not just blind absorption.

Two Ways to Sammā·samādhi (Right Concentration)

Cultivation After Having Set (*Paṇidhāya bhāvanā*)

Using a mind-brightening basis to overcome hindrances. Setting the mind deliberately on an uplifting topic (recollecting the Buddha, generosity, or death) to relieve a negative mind, calm bodily fabrication, and naturally transition into Jhāna.

Cultivation Without Having Set (*Appaṇidhāya bhāvanā*)

Open, choiceless awareness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*). Not fixing the mind outwardly. Observing the body, feelings, mind, or phenomena intuitively, without constriction, allowing insight and concentration to arise naturally.



The Architecture of the Four Jhānas

1st Jhāna

Joy and happiness born
of separation.

Thinking and considering
are active.

2nd Jhāna

Quiescence of thinking.

Internal illumination
and mental poise.

3rd Jhāna

Dispassion for joy.

Equanimous, mindful,
experiencing happiness
with the body.

4th Jhāna

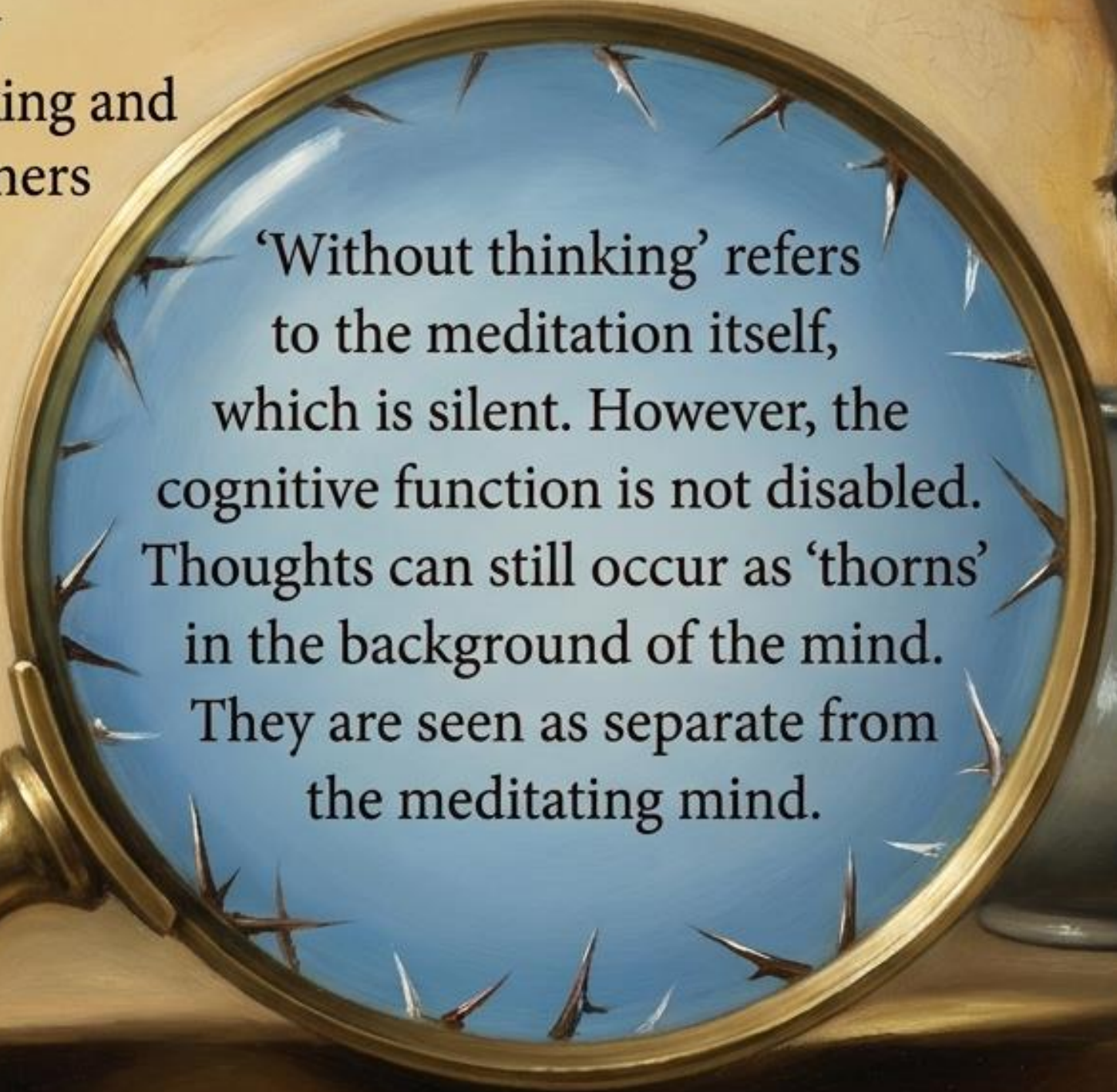
Abandoning of both
happiness and suffering.

Purity of equanimity
and mindfulness.

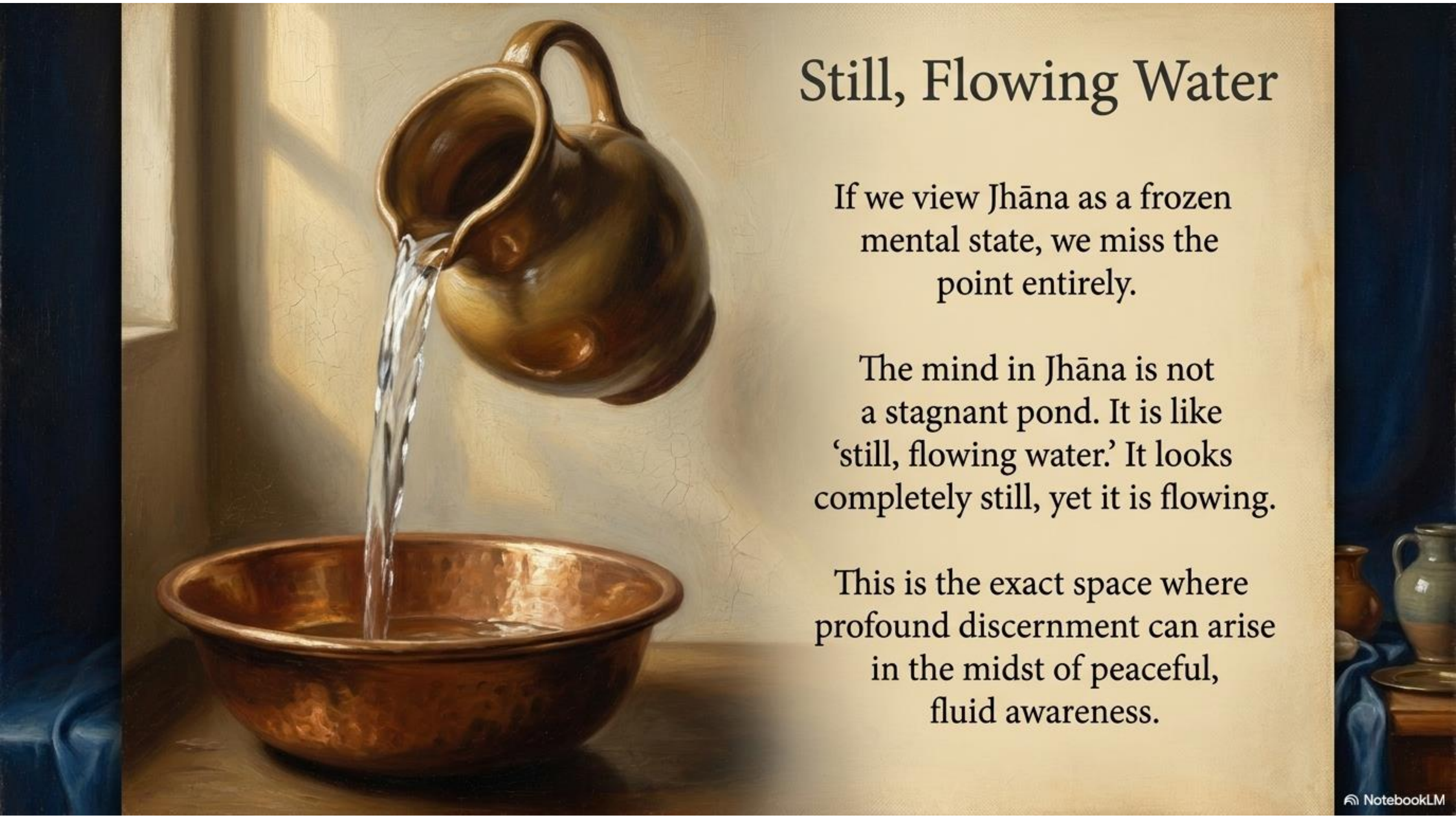
The progression is not about sinking into a deeper unconscious
trance; it is an ascension of the mind through the progressive
shedding of mental fabrications.

The Paradox of the Second Jhāna

The 2nd Jhāna is explicitly described as ‘without thinking and considering.’ Yet practitioners are meant to remain ‘fully aware’ (*sampajāno*). How?



‘Without thinking’ refers to the meditation itself, which is silent. However, the cognitive function is not disabled. Thoughts can still occur as ‘thorns’ in the background of the mind. They are seen as separate from the meditating mind.

A still life painting featuring a copper pitcher tilted to pour water into a copper bowl. The scene is set against a light, textured background with soft lighting. The pitcher is positioned in the upper left, and the bowl is in the lower left. The water is captured in mid-pour, creating a dynamic contrast with the still objects. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Still, Flowing Water

If we view Jhāna as a frozen mental state, we miss the point entirely.

The mind in Jhāna is not a stagnant pond. It is like 'still, flowing water.' It looks completely still, yet it is flowing.

This is the exact space where profound discernment can arise in the midst of peaceful, fluid awareness.

The Path Forward: Reclaiming the Practice

Stop Trying to “Enter a State”

Abandon the goal-oriented pursuit of inducing an artificial, sensory-deprived trance.



Focus on the Work of Meditating

Engage in the action. Calm bodily fabrication, maintain whole-body awareness, and let go of unconscious efforting.

Allow Insight to Flow

Trust that true Jhāna is an active, heightened mind where discernment and peace naturally coexist.

The mind is composed, not because it is trapped, but because it is free.